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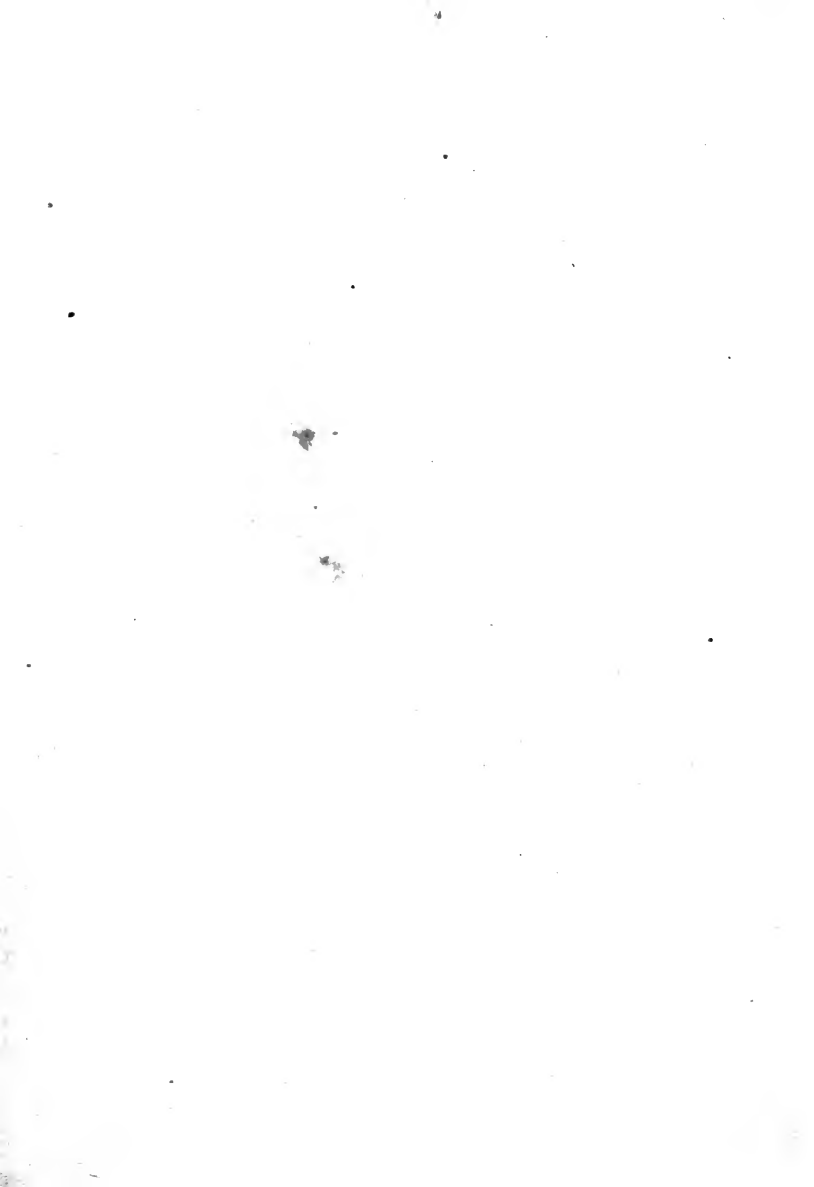


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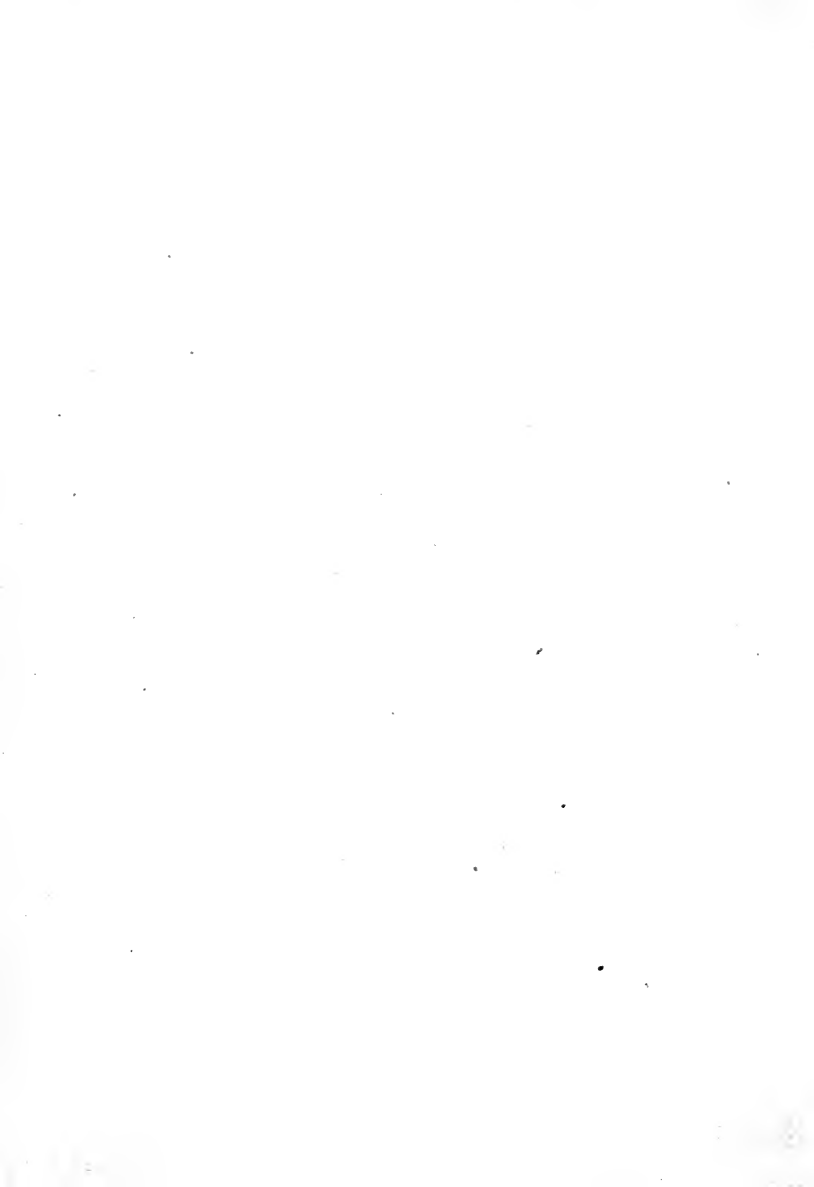
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# GUILDEROY

BY

OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF

"UNDER TWO FLAGS," "SIGNA," "A HOUSE PARTY," ETC.

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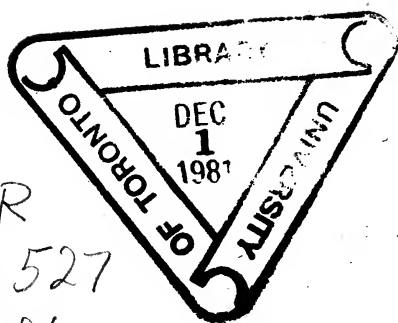
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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# GUILDEROY.

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## CHAPTER I.

LORD GUILDEROY had written a few pages of an essay on the privileges and the duties of friendship.

"Friendship is generally cruelly abused by those who profess it," he had written with much truth. "It is too often supposed, like Love, to carry with it an official right to that kind of candour which is always insolence. There can be no greater mistake. The more intimate our relations are with any one, be it in friendship or in love, the less should we strain the opportunity to say impertinent and disagreeable things. Intimacy does not absolve from courtesy, though it is so often separated from it by the unwisdom and the impetuosity of human nature. Indeed, there is even a kind of meanness in taking advantage of our entry into the inner temple of the soul to leave good manners outside on the threshold. Abuse of all privilege is vulgar, and the privileges of friendship, as they are without prescription and left solely to our own judgment, demand an infinite delicacy and forbearance in their

exercise. There are many moments in friendship, as in love, when silence is beyond words. The faults of our friend may be clear to us, but it is well to seem to shut our eyes to them. It is doubtful if fault-finding ever did any good yet, or served to eradicate any fault against which it is directed. Friendship is usually treated by the majority of mankind as a tough and everlasting thing which will survive all manner of bad treatment. But this is an exceedingly great and foolish error. Friendship may be killed, like love, by bad treatment; it may even die in an hour of a single unwise word; its conditions of existence are that it should be dealt with delicately and tenderly, being as it is a sensitive plant and not a road-side thistle. We must not expect our friend to be above humanity. We need not love his defects, but we should forbear to dwell on them even in our own meditations. We should not demand from him what it is impossible he should give. A character can only bestow that which it possesses. Time and absence are the enemies of friendship, as of love; but they need not necessarily destroy it, as they must destroy love. For love is so intimately interwoven with physical joys, that without these it cannot exist eternally; but friendship, being an immaterial and intellectual affection, ought to be able to endure without personal contact, and to outlast even the total separation of two lives——.”

Having written thus he rose, and paced to and fro his library.

“That is not in the least true,” he reflected. “It ought to be, but it is not. Between the best friends long absence raises a mist like that which the Brahmin

magician calls up to conceal himself. Behind the mist the features that we once knew so well grow vague and unfamiliar. Frequent contact is necessary to sustain all sympathy. It is no fault of ours; it is due to our imperfect memories, and the change which comes over our minds as well as our bodies with years."

He did not go back to his writing-table. The glass doors of his library stood open and he walked straight through them. The gardens stretched before them, half in sunshine, half in shadow. Broad lawns, clumps of rare evergreens, stately trees, beds of flowers which had something of an old-fashioned carelessness and naturalness in their arrangement. The distance was closed in by high, close-clipped box hedges, relic of the days of Queen Anne. He strolled out into the warm moist air along the terrace of roses which stretched before this wing of the house. The roses were all tea-roses, and the terrace was roofed and enclosed with them; a few broad stone steps led from it into the garden below; at either end of it was a great cedar. It was a dreamy, pleasant, poetic place. The house had more stately façades than this; some of it was regal and very imposing in its dimensions and its decorations, but this side of it was simple, old-fashioned and charming in its simplicity. It was the part of the house which he always used by preference himself.

Ladysrood had been so called in very distant days of early British Christianity from some miracle of which the memories were lost under the mist of many centuries. It had been the site of a monastery in the days of Augustine and of Bede, and then the stronghold of the race of which its present lord was the sole

male representative. The house, as it now stood, had been built in Tudor days and had had additions made to it under architects of the Renaissance. The Tudor section of it was that which Guilderoy loved and made especially his own; the Renaissance part of it was left for purposes of stately hospitality and ceremonial entertainment: it was also in its way beautiful, but he disliked it. He had lived much in Italy, and in these great rooms with their frescoed ceilings, their sculptured cornices, their marble columns, their seemingly endless *coup d'œil*, he missed the Italian sun; they made him shiver in the grey, damp, gusty English weather. Every one else, however, admired them immensely, and they helped to make Ladysrood a very noble house, though to its master it seemed a dull one. The gardens were charming, the park was large and undulating, the timber was superb, and beyond the park was wide, heathery, breezy moorland, which stretched westward to the western coast.

He walked along the terrace without any especial aim or object in doing so. The day was late in September, but the air was still warm. The dahlias and china-asters were glowing in their beds, and the salvias, blue and red, made strong bands of colour where the sun's rays caught them. There was a fresh homely scent of damp grass and fallen leaves, and now and then a scent from the sea, which was but a few miles off beyond the woods of the home park. ✕

"It is a dear place," he thought. He always thought so when he freshly returned to it; when he had been in it a few weeks it grew tiresome, dull, provincial—yet he loved it always. At times it wore a mute reproach

to him for leaving it so often alone there in its stateliness and silence, abandoned to the old servants who had known it in his grandfather's time, and to whom every nook and corner of it, every cup and saucer on the shelves, every lozenge in the casements, were sacred. They opened it all, and dusted it all, and every day let the light stream through the numerous rooms, and galleries, and staircases, and corridors, and watched with vigilance the sight-seers who came on the public day to stare open-mouthed at its splendours. No house in England was better cared for in its master's absence than this was, and yet it occasionally seemed to him to ask reproachfully, "Why leave me so long alone?"

"How is it?" he thought, "how is it that we have lost the art of living in these dear old houses? Better men than we did it and were not bored by it—did not even know what being bored meant. They were cut off from the world by the impassable roads that were round them. It took weeks to get to London, and was a portentous journey even to the nearest country town; and yet they were contented, and they were not only contented—they were often cultured scholars, true philosophers, fine soldiers when they had to draw the sword. They had the art of sufficing to themselves, and we have lost it. We are all of us dependent on excitement from without. All that our superior studies and our varied experiences and our endless travels have done for us is to render us entirely unable to support half an hour's solitude."

"Is it not so, Hilda?" he said aloud, as a lady approached him.

"As I have not the honour of knowing what you

are thinking of, how can I say whether I agree with it or not?" replied his sister.

"It is too much trouble to put it all into words. If you were a sympathetic woman you would guess it without explanation."

"I am too matter of fact to be sympathetic; you have told me so often. All the common sense of the race has concentrated itself in me."

"A woman with common sense is dreadful," he replied somewhat peevishly. "It is an unplesant quality, even in a man. One's steward always has it, and one's banker, and one's solicitor; but they are none of them people whom one sees with unalloyed delight."

"They are very useful people," said the lady. "Without them I do not know where you would be."

"Living in a garret in Paris, or in a mezzanina in Venice, with some Jew or some manufacturer here in my place, no doubt. I am not ungrateful," he replied. "I was, indeed, wishing that I could live here all the year round, as our great-great-grandfather did in George the Second's days, going out in state with twelve horses and outriders when he did go out, which was once in ten years——"

"You could drive twelve horses if it amused you; but I think it would have rather a circus-look, a *soupeçon* of Hengler. And where would be the devoted rustics, who were ready to drag our great-great-grandfather's wheels out of the mud?"

"Britons still love lords," replied Guilderoy, "and will do so even when Mr. Chamberlain, as President of the Republic, shall have decreed that all titles must be abolished. The rustic may have ceased to be devoted,

but he still likes a gentleman better than he likes a cad. He will pull one out of the mud sooner than he will the other. That is a sentiment in the English breast which has been too much neglected by the politicians. In France, Jacques Bonhomme hates M. le Marquis savagely; but in England, Bill and Jack have a rude unavowed admiration for my lord duke. Hunting and cricket have done that."

"How well that comes from you, who never cared about either a fox or a wicket!"

"What have my own personal tastes or distastes to do with a national question? I should no doubt have been a much more popular man in the county if I had liked foxes and wickets! Hunting, to me, seems barbarous, and cricket childish; but as factors in the national life they have had great uses."

"You are so very dispassionate that you are intensely irritating," said his sister. "Most people adore things or hate things *en bloc*."

"Happy people!" replied Guilderoy. "They are never troubled with any doubt or any divided inclinations. It must be delightful to have the world sorted into goats and sheep, into black and white, in that fashion. I should enjoy it. The world to me looks like a billiard-table; here and there a ball rolls on it, that is all; the table is perfectly monotonous and profoundly uninteresting."

"It does not look monotonous to those who play billiards," she replied. "What you want to do to give you an interest in existence is to occupy yourself with its games, trivial or serious."

"I have a great many interests in existence. Of

some of them you don't approve; you think them too interesting."

"Come and have some tea," said his sister; and she walked to the glass doors of the library and entered that apartment and rang for the servant. "Bring tea here," she said to the footman who answered her summons; and in five minutes the tea was brought, served in Queen Anne silver and cups of old Worcester.

## CHAPTER II.

EVELYN HERBERT, LORD GUILDEROY had been born to an enviable fate. A long minority had given him a considerable fortune, and his name was as old as the days of Knut. His old home of Ladysrood had been inscribed in the Domesday Book, and had never belonged to any but his race. His mother had been a Frenchwoman of high rank, and his father a man of brilliant accomplishments and blameless character. He inherited from his mother a great charm and grace of manner, and from his father a love of learning and a facile and brilliant intelligence. Personally he was handsome and patrician-looking; tall, fair, and perfectly graceful; and his admirable constitution preserved him safely through the many follies with which he risked the injury of his health. Destiny had been kind—even lavish—to him, and if, with all its favours, he was not a happy man, it was, as his sister told him, most clearly nobody's fault but his own. He could not perhaps have said himself whether he were happy or not. Happiness



is a fugitive thing, and not apt to sit long quietly in an arm-chair at the banquet of life. It is a fairy, which is propitiated rather by temperament than by fortune.

His sister, Lady Sunbury, was a handsome woman; tall, stately, and imposing. She looked young for the mother of sons who were in the Guards and at Oxford. She had an expression of power and of authority; her eyes were clear and penetrating; her mouth handsome and cold. There were many who thought it a pity that she had not been born to the title of Guilderoy instead of her brother—her husband amongst them, because then she could not have married him.

"You are perfectly right; I know you are always right; I admit you are; but it is just that which makes you so damnably odious!" said Lord Sunbury once, in a burst of rage, in his town house, speaking in such stentorian tones that the people passing up Grosvenor Street looked up at his open windows, and a crossing-sweeper said to a match-seller, "My eye! ain't he giving it to the old gal like blazes!"

Lady Sunbury, however, never divined that she was called an old girl by the crossing-sweeper under her windows, and her dignity remained unimpaired either by that fact or her husband's fury. She was a perfectly dignified woman. She looked admirably at a state ball; she received admirably in her own house. She would have been admirable in a revolution, in a siege, or in a civil war; but in the little daily things of life she was not pliant, and she was not what is comprised in the three French words *facile à vivre*. Now to be *facile à vivre* is, as modern existence is

constructed, an infinitely higher quality than all the heroic virtues.

"And yet what a good woman she is!" thought Guilderooy often. "There is something quite pathetic in such goodness being thrown away on such sinners as Sunbury and I! And to think that if she were only a little less excellent she would have had such a much better chance of succeeding with both of us!"

Yet Guilderooy, who was of an affectionate nature, was fond of her; she had been very kind to him when he had been a little boy and she a tall girl in the schoolroom; he always remembered that; besides, she was the only near relative that he had remaining to him, and he was always pleased to have her stay at his house as she was staying now for a few days on her way to visits in the adjoining counties, even if her arguments and her reproaches, which were invariably tuned to the same key, left him at the end of each of her visits disposed to sympathise with that very uninteresting reprobate, Lord Sunbury.

She was one of those admirably virtuous women who are more likely to turn men away from the paths of virtue than the wickedest of sirens. Her brother was more tolerant of her sermons than her husband was, or her sons were; he appreciated the excellence of her motives and the sincerity of her affections better than they did, possibly because he could get away from both more easily than they could. He pitied her, moreover. An intellectual and intelligent woman, she had married a silly man for his handsome person—a folly clever women often commit. A proud woman, she

was poor with that most painful of all poverty, inadequate means to sustain a great position; and a woman of strong affections, she was doomed to see her attachment impatiently received, or as impatiently shaken off, in all the relations of her life, because she had not the tact to control her temper or to resist her love of argument and domination.

"My dear Hilda," he had said to her more than once, "it is not enough to be attached to people to secure their affections; we must suit ourselves to them, we must study them, we must make ourselves agreeable to them. Mr. Morris has said that love is enough, but it isn't. It is only a bore if it is not accompanied by self-restraint, discrimination, and daily exercise of tact and judgment."

But he might as well have spoken to the Kneller and Vandyke ladies in his picture-gallery. Lady Sunbury admitted that he was right in principle, but in practice she still continued to irritate herself, infuriate her husband, and alienate her sons, because she could not keep to herself the superior good sense with which nature had gifted her.

"When there is not a woman in the house one never thinks of tea," said Guilderoy, as he took his cup from her.

"You should have a woman in the house," said Lady Sunbury curtly and with emphasis.

He smiled, and walked up and down the library, with his cup in his hand.

"What an uncomfortable habit you have of walking about!" said his sister irritably, with the Queen Anne cream-jug in her hand.

"You think all my habits uncomfortable when you do not think them improper," he returned with perfect good-humour.

"Yes, they are the habits of a man who has lived entirely for himself and after his own caprices."

"Possibly."

He did not care to defend himself.

Lady Sunbury looked at him as he paced to and fro the library floor. She was passionately attached to him, and proud of him, only she could not restrain herself from worrying and finding fault with him, after the manner of women. She was a few years older than he, and her sense of herself as of a female mentor set over him by nature never left her. She had been intensely ambitious for him; she had believed, perhaps with reason, that if he had chosen there was no position in the State which he could not have filled, and filled with honour. And here all his life was slipping away from him, only occupied with idle dreams and passions as idle. She shut down the lid of the Queen Anne teapot angrily.

"My dear Evelyn, you have missed your vocation," she said, with much irritation. "Every man who does miss his vocation is an unhappy man. He may be to the eyes of others prosperous, but there is a worm which eateth him and leaves him no rest. The worm in you is suppressed ambition. It is a malady like suppressed gout. Nature, circumstance, your own temperament, and all the accidents of birth joined together, which they so very seldom do for anybody, to make it perfectly possible for you to have been a great man."

Thus she spoke, and her voice emphasised imposingly the two last words.

Her auditor responded languidly:

"I have no ambition, either suppressed or developed, and there are no great men. When a friend of mine said that there were no great men to Mr. Gladstone, he, who probably felt the remark to be personally slighting, replied that there were as many as ever, but that the general level was higher, so that they did not look so remarkable. It is a reply comforting to modern mediocrity. I am not prepared to say that it is a true one."

"I think it is true, but it is altogether outside my argument. I am saying that you might so easily have been a great man, as great men go in these days; whether they are really as big or not as they used to be doesn't matter the least; you might have been as big as any one of them, and you are mistaken if you think that you are not ambitious—you do not know yourself."

"Know thyself, saith the sage. It is the most difficult and the most depressing of all tasks, and not a very useful one when it is accomplished."

Lady Sunbury continued, as though he had not spoken, to pursue her theme:

"It is only men in your position who can touch public life without any possible suspicion of their motives. It was the patriotism of the great peers which carried England through her troubles from '89 to '15. It is only men who have already everything which position can give them who can govern with perfectly clean hands, or who can have the courage in a great crisis

which is alone born of absolutely pure disinterestedness."

"I have not the smallest qualification for governing anything, not even a dog," replied Guilderoy. "All my dogs do what they like with me—I am positively afraid of displeasing them."

"There is hardly anything you might not have been, with your position and your talents," continued the lady. "You are indolent, you are capricious, and you are very crotchety; but these are faults you might have overcome if you had chosen, and if you had absorbed yourself in public life you would have been a very much happier man than you are."

"Public life is not a recipe for happiness—it is worry, nothing else but worry from morning to night, and nobody does any good in it. They are flies on the wheel of the bicycle of democracy; the bicycle is rushing down hill as fast as it can go; no fly will stop it."

"No: no fly will, certainly; but when it falls over at the bottom of the hill, the man who will be there ready to pick it up and get into its saddle will be the master of it and of the situation."

"That time is far off. It has only just started from the top of the hill in England, and the man who will wait at the bottom will be some soldier who will stand no nonsense, and will set it going again with a bang of his sword. It is always so. I never see any use in fretting and fuming about it. Democracy, after having made everything supremely hideous and uncomfortable for everybody, always ends by clinging to the coat-tails of some successful general."

"If our aristocracy did its duty——"

"Oh no, you are wholly mistaken. Those who envy us and hate us would not be disarmed by the spectacle of our virtues were they ever so numerous. I may not have done my duty individually; I do not pretend to have done it; but I think that the Order has, as a collective body, done theirs very admirably, and with exceeding self-denial. Take our House, for example. The popular idea of the House of Lords is that it is a kind of hot-bed for all manner of unjust privileges and abominable sinecures. The country does not in the least understand the quantity of solid useful work which is done there in committee, the way in which young men sacrifice time and pleasure to do that work, and the honest painstaking care for the national interests which is brought to the consideration of every bill that comes up to it. The House of Lords wants nothing of the nation, and therefore it is the only candid and disinterested guardian of the people's needs and resources. It has never withstood the real desire of the country; it has only stood between the country and its impetuous and evanescent follies. It has given breathing time to it and made it pause before taking a headlong leap, but it has never opposed what it saw to be the real and well-considered national will. It has done what the American Senate does; but it has done it better than any elective senate can do, because the moment any political body is elective it has at once a tendency to servility, and is more or less open to cause, and to be acted on by, corruption. As you said yourself just now, it is only men who have already a position so great that nothing can make it greater who can govern

public life with no possible taint of ulterior or personal motive. It is because personal motives have crept in so insidiously into English politics that they have deteriorated in character so greatly as they have done in our time."

"Every word you say only strengthens my opinion that you should haven taken a part, and a great part, in national life."

"You narrow a public question to a private one—women always do. I know myself, which you admit is rare, and I am wholly unfitted for public life as it is now conducted in England; I have views which would appal even my own party. I think that we should have the courage of our opinions, and that we should not bid for popularity by pretending that the mob is our equal; we should have the courage to demand that supremacy should go to the fittest, and we should refuse to allow ignorance, drunkenness, and poverty to call themselves our masters. We should declare that the minority is always more likely to be in the right than the majority, and that if generations of culture, authority, and courtesy do not make a better product than generations of ignorance, servility, and squalor, then let all 'laws and learning, grace and manners die,' since they have proved themselves absolutely useless. But we have not the courage of our opinions; we are all kneeling in the mud and swearing that the mud is higher than the stars. I for one will not kneel, and therefore I tell you I have no place in the public life of my times."

Lady Sunbury was vexed and irritated.

"I do not see that your eulogy of the House of



Lords is in accord with your condemnation of public life. If you have chosen——”

“I beg your pardon. I say the House of Lords is more admirable and useful than the people have the remotest idea of, who think it only a kind of glass-frame for rearing the mushrooms of prestige and privilege. But I think the House of Lords would be truer to itself if it had the courage to tell the people that it could govern them, were it an absolute oligarchy, with infinitely more honour abroad and prosperity at home than they will ever get out of the professional politicians and the salaried agitators whom it sends up to Westminster.”

“If it did it would be swept away.”

“Is that so sure? At all events, it would fall with dignity. It is not dignified to pass bills which it knows to be poisonous to the honour and welfare of the nation, because it has the *couteau à la gorge* of its own threatened extinction. Courage is the one absolutely necessary quality to an aristocracy; and I know not why our House should fear its own abolition. It is the country which would suffer far more than ourselves.”

“Go to the House and say so.”

“The House is not sitting,” he replied with a little laugh, as he rose and walked to one of the windows. Opposite to the window was a great cedar tree spreading its dark shade over a velvet lawn. On one of the boughs of the cedar a wood-dove was perched high up against the sun; the light made the white and fawn of his plumage look silvery and gold; he was murmuring all sorts of sweet things to his lady-love, visible to him

though not to his observer; he was perfectly, ideally happy. Round the trees at the same moment were flying three sparrows fussing, shrieking, quarrelling. The foremost had a straw in his beak, and the others wanted it.

"The professional politicians," murmured Guilderoy. "The lover is wiser by a great deal."

"That depends on what sort of person the lady is," said his sister, with some unpleasantness in her tone.

"Not at all," said Guilderoy. "She is to him what he thinks her at all events; who wants more?"

And he continued to watch the dove cooing and fluttering in the sunshine on the topmost branch of the great cedar.

"The dove wants a great deal more if he is wise," said Lady Sunbury.

"If he is wise he is not half a lover," replied Guilderoy. "The sparrows are wise in your sense and the world's, not in mine."

"I wish you were like the sparrows."

"You wish I were a professional politician, or a salaried agitator? My dear Hilda, what taste!"

"I wish you were anything but what you are."

"One's relatives invariably do."

Lady Sunbury went to her brother and put her hand in affectionate apology on his shoulder.

"You know what I mean, my dear. You have such talents, such great opportunities, so noble a character. I cannot bear to see them all thrown away on women."

He laughed, and moved a little away.

"Every woman thinks a man's life 'thrown away' on another woman; when a man's life is given to her-

self she thinks it 'consecrated' to her. You always use two vocabularies for yourself and your neighbours."

Lady Sunbury turned away, offended and silent.

Guilderoy still continued to gaze dreamily at the cedar with the birds in it, which had furnished him with his metaphor.

### CHAPTER III.

"He really ought to make some marriage," thought Lady Sunbury, when she had left him, and took her way through the drawing-rooms opening one out of another in a succession of rooms, all decorated and furnished as they had been in George the Second's time, and with their ceilings and panels and mantel-pieces painted by the Watteau School.

"He really ought to marry," she thought; "it makes me wretched to think that he should go on like this."

And yet what woman living would have seemed to Lady Sunbury to be the equal of her brother?

She would have been sure that a Venus was a dunce, a Pallas a blue, a Penelope a fool, a Helen a wanton, and an Antigone a fright. All the graces, all the muses, and all the saints rolled into one would have seemed to her either a dowdy or an *écervelée*, either a humdrum nobody or a portentous jade, if such an one had been called Lady Guilderoy. She had a most ardent and honest desire to see her brother married, and yet she felt that his marriage would be quite intolerable to her. For a person who prided herself on

her consistency the inconsistency of her feelings was an irritation.

"I should hate her. I could not help hating her," she mused as she walked through the drawing-rooms. "But I should always be just to her, and I should be very fond of the children."

Nothing, however, she knew, could be further from her brother's intentions than to give her either the woman to hate or the children to adore.

He had seen all the most charming marriageable women of Europe, and he had taken none of them. So far as his life was pledged at all it was given to a woman whom he could not marry.

Guilderoy, left to himself, glanced at his neglected essay lying on the writing-table. "What is the use of saying these things?" he thought. "Everything has been said already in the *Lysis*. We keep repeating it with variations of our own, and we think our imitations are novelty and wisdom."

He threw the written sheets between the pages of a blotting-book, and took up a letter lying under them and read it again; he had read it when it had arrived with all his other correspondence in the forenoon. It was from the lady of whom his sister did not approve.

It was an impassioned letter.

Now, when a man is himself in love such letters are delightful, but when his own passion is waning they are apt to be wearisome.

"How much of it is love?" he thought. "And how much love of proprietorship, jealousy of possible opponents, pleasure in a flattering *affiche*? God forgive me! I have not the smallest right to be exacting in

such matters or hypercritical, and yet it takes so much more to satisfy me than I have ever got in these things."

He was conscious of his ingratitude.

After all, a great many women had loved him greatly, and had given him all they had to give; and if the quality of their love had not been equal to some vague exaggerated impossible ideal which floated before his fancy, it had not been their fault probably; much more probably his own.

He lit a match and burnt the letter, and remembered with a pang the time when a single line from the same hand had been worn next his heart for days after it had been received.

"Why do our feelings only remain such a very little time at that stage?" he mused; and he wondered if the wood-dove in the cedar tree knew these varying and gradual changes from ardour to indifference. He was not actually indifferent. He felt that to become indifferent was a possibility, and when this is felt indifference itself is never far off we may be sure. "*Elle vient à pas lents; mais elle vient.*"

The letter asked him to spend the winter in Naples. He usually spent the winter somewhere in the south, but a vague dislike to the south rose in him before this request.

The sense that his presence there was regarded as a right weakened his desire to go. Like all high-mettled animals, he turned restive when he felt the pressure of the curb. With the reins floating loose on his neck he followed docilely.

"If I do go," he thought, "I shall have all my days mapped out for me; I shall be worried if I look at an-

other woman; I shall be told fifty times a week that I am heartless. Perhaps I am heartless, but I think not; and, even if one is, to be told so perpetually does not make one's heart softer."

Was he heartless?

He thought not; and in this respect he knew his own temperament. He was even more tender-hearted than most men; but he had been spoiled and caressed by fortune, and habitual self-indulgence had made him apt only to consider himself with an unconsciousness which made it less egotism than habit.

He had done some things which were unselfish and generous in an unusual degree; but they had been great things in which the indolence and fastidiousness of his character had been banished by new and strong emotions. In ordinary matters he was selfish without being in the least aware of it, as indeed happens with the majority of people.

When the letter was burnt he went to one of the windows and looked out. The day was closing in, and the shadows were taking the colours from the autumnal flowers and making the woods beyond look black and forbidding, while a few red leaves were being driven along the terrace under a breeze which had suddenly risen and blew freshly from the sea. A winter here would be unendurable, he thought. It was very many years since he had seen Ladysrood in the winter months. None of the sports of winter were agreeable to him, and he did not care for house parties which required an amount of attention and observance from a host very distasteful to his temperament. He usually came here only when he wished for entire solitude, and the gentry

of his county sighed in vain for the various entertainments, the balls, the dinners, and the hunting breakfasts, to which, had Guilderoy been like any one else, the great house would doubtless have been dedicated. But he saw no necessity to so dedicate it. Ladysrood was much isolated, being surrounded on three sides with moorland and on the other side shut in by the sea; and though his distant neighbours would willingly have driven twenty miles to him, he gave them no invitation or permission to do so. The great *fêtes* which had celebrated his majority some fifteen or sixteen years before had been the last time in which the reception-rooms had been illuminated for a great party.

He was an idol of the great world, which always considered him capricious but charming; but his county saw only the caprice and none of the charm, and thought him rude, eccentric, and misanthropical. In his father's and forefather's time the hospitalities of Ladysrood had been profuse and magnificent; the closing of its doors was an affront to the whole countryside, against the unpopularity of which the good sense of Lady Sunbury had in vain often protested.

"I have no desire to be popular," Guilderoy invariably replied. "There is nothing on earth so vulgar as the craze for popularity which nowadays makes people who ought to know better only anxious to be fawned on by the crowd."

"*Vox populi vox Dei*," said Lady Sunbury.

"It always was in the esteem of the vulgar themselves," replied her brother. "Myself, I wholly decline to believe that the gods ever speak through the throats of any mob."

"Can you call your own county people a mob?"

"Oh yes. A well-dressed mob, but a mob decidedly. If you let them in by the great gates I shall go out by the garden-door."

And they never were let into Ladysrood, infinitely to their disgust. A few men dined with him occasionally, that was all. It was not wonderful that his neighbours thought Lady Sunbury would have been better in his place.

When he looked out on to the terrace now and saw the little red leaves blowing, he rang and ordered his horse. He was fond of riding in the dusk for an hour or two before dinner. But as he was about to mount his horse he heard the sound of wheels coming up the avenue which led to the western door of the house: a *petite entrée* only used by intimate and privileged persons.

"Who can it be?" Guilderoy wondered to himself, for no one then in the county, to his own knowledge, was on sufficiently friendly terms with him to come thither uninvited. A moment after he caught sight in the distance of the invader, and with pleasure and astonishment recognised his cousin Lord Aubrey.

A few moments later he welcomed him at the west door.

"My dear Francis, how glad I am!" he said with perfect sincerity. "To what good chance do we owe this happy surprise?"

"If you bestowed a little attention on the politics of your own county," replied Lord Aubrey, "you would know that I had to attend a meeting in your own town yesterday. I heard you were here, and I did not like



to be so near Ladysrood without passing a night with you. If I had known sooner the date of the meeting I would have sent you word, but it was made a week earlier than I expected at the eleventh hour."

"I am delighted to see you, and there could be never the slightest occasion to let me know beforehand. Ladysrood is yours whether I am in it or not. Would you like to go direct to your rooms, and I will take you to Hilda afterwards?"

"With pleasure," said Lord Aubrey. "I am hoarse, dusty, and stupid, for I have been declaiming for three hours on policy to some five thousand people of whom four thousand probably would spell policy with an s, if they could spell it at all."

"Spelling is a prejudice, like a love for ground leases," said Guilderoy. "Come and have a bath and forget Demos for a day."

"You continue to forget him always," said Lord Aubrey.

Francis de Lisle, Lord Aubrey, was a cousin-german of Guilderoy's, and some few years older than himself. He was a tall man, with an air of great distinction and an expression at once melancholy and amused, cynical and good-humoured. He carried his great height somewhat listlessly and indolently, and his grey eyes were half veiled by sleepy eyelids, from which they could, however, flash glances which searched the inmost souls of others. He was heir to a Marquisate, and had dedicated his whole life to what he considered to be the obligations of his station. He did not like public life, but he followed it with conscientiousness and self-sacrifice. He was not a man of genius, but he had

the power of moving and of controlling other men, and his absolute sincerity of character and of utterance was known to the whole country.

"How is your sister?" he asked now, as he came to the tea-room. "And what are you doing in the west of England in autumn, you who hate grey skies and cold winds?"

"I am delighted to be in the west of England since it affords me a quiet day with you," said Guilderoy with perfect truth, for he liked and admired his cousin. He had indeed a warmer feeling towards Lord Aubrey than Aubrey had for him. A man who has combated his own indolence and become excessively occupied is apt to have slight patience with a man who has allowed his indolence and his instincts to be the sole controllers of his life. Guilderoy's existence was a union of contemplation and pleasure; to Lord Aubrey it appeared the existence of an unconscionable egotist; and yet he had a friendly regard for the egotist.

"You have much more talent than I have," he said once to his cousin, "and yet your voice is never heard by the country;" and Guilderoy gave him much the same reasons for his silence which he had given to his sister.

"You believe in a great many things, and you care about others," he added. "Now I do not believe, and I do not care. Talent, even if I possess it—which I doubt—cannot replace the forces which come from conviction. Those forces I have not."

"Here is your model hero; the one perfect person endowed with all the virtues and moral conscientiousness in which I am so sadly deficient," said Guilderoy

to his sister, as he entered her presence with his cousin as the sun descended over the western woods.

"I admit that I wish your life were more like his; you would probably be happier and certainly more useful," said Lady Sunbury as she welcomed Aubrey with more cordiality than she showed to most people.

"I am by no means sure," said Aubrey, "that when one does choose Pallas one is always right in the choice, if Hercules were; and if one is as intolerant of being bored as Evelyn is, it is no kind of use to take her; a divorce would be sued for immediately."

"You do not regret your choice, surely?" said Hilda Sunbury in some surprise. Aubrey always seemed to her to be as absorbed in public life as other men are in pleasure.

"I did not say that I regretted," he replied, "but misgivings visit one inevitably. *A quoi bon?* One cannot help thinking that now and then. I dare say a man of absolute genius does not have that doubt, but when one is a very ordinary personage one must feel now and then that one might as well have enjoyed oneself and let the nation alone."

"You are too modest; your example alone is of the most infinite benefit. There is something so noble in a man who has nothing to gain and everything to lose devoting himself to political life. It is those sacrifices which have made the strength of England and of the aristocracy of England."

Aubrey smiled, a little sadly: "We shall not last very long, do whatever we will."

"I do not believe the principle of aristocracy will ever die out," said Lady Sunbury resolutely. "It is

rooted in human nature and in nature itself. All governments drift towards it whatever they call themselves. Even savage tribes have a chief. Where our party has been so culpable has been in pretending to agree with those who deny this. Toryism should have the courage of its opinions."

"Certainly the first virtue of an aristocracy should be courage," said her cousin. "An aristocracy is nothing without it. A democracy in England would have sent a humble deputation and the keys of the Cinque Ports to Napoleon after Austerlitz. What stood against him and prevailed against him were the valour and the stubborn patriotism of the English nobility. Aristocratic governments are often faulty; they may be arrogant, illiberal, prejudiced; they may be so, though they are not so necessarily; but there is one fine quality in them which no democracy ever possesses: they have Honour. A democracy cannot understand honour; how should it? The caucus is chiefly made up of men who sand their sugar, put alum in their bread, forge bayonets and girders which bend like willow wands, send bad calico to India, pay their operatives by the tally shop, and insure vessels at Lloyd's which they know will go to the bottom before they have been ten days at sea. Honour is an idealistic and impersonal thing; it can only exist in men who have inherited its traditions and have learned to rate it higher than all material success."

"I quite agree with you," said Guilderoy. "Unless we honestly believe that we are the natural leaders of the nation by virtue of the honour which we uphold and represent, we have no business to attempt to lead it, and we ought not to conceal or to disavow that we

have that belief in ourselves. Lord Salisbury has been often accused of arrogance; people have never seen that what they mistook for arrogance was the natural, candid consciousness of a great noble that he is more capable of leading the country than most men composing it would be. If a man have not that belief in himself he has no business to assume command anywhere, whether in a cabinet or in a camp or in a cricket field. I have no sort of belief in myself, and therefore I have always let the State roll on without help or hindrance from me in any way."

"You may be a hindrance without knowing it," murmured Aubrey; "a boulder in a highroad does not move, but sometimes it overturns the carriage as effectually as if it did."

"By which you mean——"

"That when the Radicals of your county are disposed to point to great landowners who lead their lives to very little purpose except that of their own enjoyment, you, my dear Guilderoy, are conveniently at hand to be pointed at, and to sharpen the moral of their tale."

"It is wholly impossible for them to know what I do with my life," said Guilderoy with some anger.

"Clearly; but they judge from what they see; and you may be sure that they lose no time in making your country-side see with their eyes. For aught they can tell, no doubt, you may be visiting prisons like Howard, or capturing slave dhows like Gordon, all the time you are away from England, but they do not think so, and all they tell the county is that you have an immense income, which you don't earn, and that you spend it

anywhere sooner than in England. I am not saying that they have any business to make such remarks; I only say that they do make them."

"Let them make them and be damned!" said Guilderoy.

"With all my heart," said his cousin. "Only it is not they who ever are damned; it is always the poor, stupid, hungry, gullible crowd, which is led astray by them, and is made to believe that it would mend matters to burn down great houses and cut down old woods.

"You are always saying," continued Lord Aubrey, "that you wonder why I bore myself with public life. It does bore me endlessly, immeasurably, that I grant; but apart from all other reasons you know, Evelyn, I must consider that men in our position owe it to the country not to leave politics wholly in the hands of professional politicians. The professional politician may be honest, but his honesty is at best a questionable quality. The moment that a thing is a *métier* it is wholly absurd to talk about any disinterestedness in the pursuit of it. To the professional politician national affairs are a manufacture into which he puts his audacity and his time, and out of which he expects to make so much percentage for his lifetime. I say that we have no business, because we are lazy and fastidious, to let the vast mass of the uneducated and credulous who make up the mass of our nation be led by false guides, who only use them to climb up on their shoulders to power. If we found a man persuading a child to eat poison by telling him that it was honey, we should be as guilty as the intending mur-

derer if we did not strike the cup down and tell the child of the danger it ran. That poor, overgrown, ill-educated child, the people—the People with a big P—is always having poison thrust on it under the guise of honey. If we do not try to show it what the cup really holds, I think we are to blame. That is the feeling which has moved me to endeavour to do what I can. I should be uneasy if I did not do it. After all, one can only act according to one's light."

"You are a very conscientious man, my dear Aubrey," said Guilderoy, "and I admire if I do not imitate you. The overgrown child will, however, always prefer the deceiver, who tenders it the poison, to you who are so careful over its health."

"That must be as it may," said Aubrey, "I cannot help the results. Men never know their best friends in public life or private. That instinct is reserved for dogs."

"I can well believe that you are indifferent to ingratitude," said Guilderoy, "and I am convinced you are the servant of your conscience. But will you tell me how you stand the vulgarity of public life? It has become so hopelessly vulgar!"

"That I grant. And it is just its vulgarity which will, I fear, every year alienate the higher minds from it more and more, and send them instead to their bookcases and their inkstands. I confess when I have shouted for an hour or two on a hustings before a general election, I have felt myself on no better intellectual level than a Cheap John. To be compelled to 'go on the stump' is a prospect which may fairly make a man who has any refinement or delicacy about him

shun political life as he would shun a collier's pot-house. There is too great a tendency to govern the world by noise."

"On the whole I think I have the better part," said Guilderoy.

"So far as your own ease goes, not a doubt of it."

"Evelyn does not admit that there is such a thing as duty," remarked Lady Sunbury from her tea-table.

"I do not like the word duty," said Guilderoy. "It is puritanic and illogical. If we are what science seems to prove, mere automata formed of cells and fibres accidentally meeting, we clearly are wholly irresponsible creatures. Nero is as innocent as St. Francis."

"What a shocking theory!"

"As shocking as you please. But it is the only logical outcome of the conclusions of physiology."

"I do not enter the lists with physiology," said Aubrey, "but it may say what it will, it cannot prevent my consciousness of an Ego which inclines to evil, and an Ego which tells me to avoid it. It is nothing very great to claim. A dog has it. He longs to steal a bone and he refrains from stealing it; he longs to bite a hand which hurts him and abstains from doing so if he finds the hand is a friend's. I do not think conscience is exclusively a human possession, though it may have become larger in human than in other animals. But it is strong enough in me to make me sensible that I am in a very great measure responsible for my actions, and all the philosophies on earth will never talk me out of that belief."

"And the belief has sent you to the House of Commons?"



"Just so; I admit the bathos—I admit the justice of your implied satire. But I go to the House of Commons because, feeling as I feel, I should do violence to my conscience not to go to it. That sounds horribly priggish, but I cannot express what I mean otherwise."

"I wish the country had a great many more men who felt like you," said Guilderoy.

He walked about a few minutes restlessly, then, his sister having left the room, he asked with some abruptness:

"You came last week from the Veneto? Did you see the Duchess Soria?"

"Yes, I saw her. She wondered very much not to see you."

"Did she say so?"

"She said so with considerable bitterness. Why were you not there?"

"I do not care to do what I am expected to do," replied Guilderoy with some impatience and some sullenness. "There can be no pleasure where there is no *imprévu*; where there is nothing voluntary. Women never understand that. Half the passions of men die early because they are expected to be eternal. Half the love which women excite they destroy because they stifle it by captivity in a hot-house, as a child might kill a wild bird."

Aubrey looked at him with some amusement.

"You are undoubtedly right. Even I, who have no pretensions to much experience in the soft science, am aware that you are most undeniably right. But how do you propose to get any woman—and any woman in love—to understand that?"

"I do not even hope it," replied Guilderoy, wearily. "I remark that the utter inability of women to understand it brings about their own unhappiness much sooner than it would otherwise come to them. If they comprehended that the bird wants fresh air, he would very possibly often return of his own good will to the hot-house."

"And tell the tale of his *amours en voyage*? My dear Evelyn, the lady would have to be as wise as Penelope and as amorous as Calypso to receive him on such terms."

"It would be love; whereas now it is only love of possession."

"You certainly ask a great deal of love, and seem to me inclined to give very little."

"One can only give what one has. Women reproach us with ceasing to care for them. Is it our fault? We cannot control impulse."

Aubrey looked at him once more.

"Poor women!" he said, involuntarily.

Guilderoy moved impatiently.

"There is no doubt of the Duchess's devotion to you," added his cousin. "On my honour, I think she suffers a great deal. She has been a coquette, no doubt, but she has never been a coquette with you."

"I do not think we ought to speak of her," said Guilderoy.

"Certainly not, unless you wish it. You introduced her name first."

"My dear Aubrey," said Guilderoy with some violence, "of all intolerable things on earth a passion which survives on one side and dies on the other is

the worst. There is no peace possible in it. You feel like a brute, whilst honestly you are no more to be blamed than the sea is to be blamed because after high tide its waters recede. No man is accountable for the flow and reflow of his own emotions. Women speak as though the heart were to be heated at will like a stove or a bath. Now of all spontaneous, capricious, changeful, and ungovernable things, the passions are the most wayward and the least reasonable. Why do you love? You cannot say. Why do you cease to love? You probably cannot say either. The forces of your emotions and desires are wholly beyond your own control. They are not electric machines—mere Leyden jars which you can charge at will. Why then is it a reproach to cease to love? It is as involuntary as it was to love at all in the beginning.”

Aubrey smiled a little dubiously.

“Excellently reasoned! I should be disposed to admit your arguments, but I doubt very much whether the Duchess Soria would see the force of them.”

“You think she was annoyed that I was not there?”

“She was much more than annoyed; she was indignant and wounded. That was easy to see. She is not a woman who cares to conceal what she feels. Why were you not there, by the way?”

“I dislike everything which is made an obligation—I told you so. What is feeling worth if it degenerate into a habit?”

“All feeling runs to seed in that fashion, unless it is broken off sharply whilst it is still in blossom: a painful fact, but a fact. Here and there perhaps there is a sentiment strong enough to endure through all the

changes of its growth, so that instead of decay it reaches almost perfection; but it is very rare, and can only be the issue of an unique character."

"The ideal love, of course, does so; but it does not exist out of the dreams of boyhood and of poets," answered Guilderoy, impatiently. "There is attraction, and there is its reaction; and between the two the time is more or less short, according to temperament and circumstances. But the end is always the same."

"What you call attraction I should not call love; I should give it an uglier name."

"Give it any name you like; it is all there is. It becomes poetic, however, in poetic natures."

"My nature is absolute prose, so I cannot pretend to understand," said Aubrey; but although he said so, it was not quite so sincerely spoken as was his wont. He had a vein of romance in his character, beneath the coldness of his exterior and the prosaic nature of his occupations. When he had been quite a boy he had made a secret marriage from pure love. It had lasted a brief space, and had ended ill. The woman for whom he had sacrificed much had been false to him in a gross and brutal intrigue. He had not made his wound public, and she had died not long after his discovery of her infidelity. No one had been aware of this unfortunate drama in his life, but it had made him at once indifferent to women and sympathetic with all sorrows of the affections. He never laughed at those who suffered. His own wound had healed, indeed, long ago, but now and then a nerve still thrilled under the remembrance of its pain. Love had little place now in his busy and laborious life, but his estimate of

it was higher than his cousin's, the doors of whose life stood wide open to it all seasons through. If there was anything in human nature which made him irritable, it was to hear men speak of the passions of life as Guilderoy spoke of them. "If they are playthings they are not passions," he was wont to say, "no more than the fireworks on the Arc de l'Etoile are the flames of the Commune."

For errors which were the birth of passion he had infinite sympathy, but with the mere caprices of the senses and the fancy he had little patience.

"He should marry," said Lady Sunbury to him of her brother, repeating her favourite lament.

Aubrey laughed.

"I should certainly pity his wife," he replied.

"Why?" said Lady Sunbury, irritated, "She would have a very agreeable position."

"Oh, no doubt," assented Aubrey. "If she were satisfied with position. Perhaps she would not be."

"Women are not romantic nowadays," said his cousin, in the tone with which she would have said that women did not wear patches.

"I suppose that there are as many—or as few—*âmes d'élite* now as then," replied Aubrey. "There never can have been very many. Why should you want him to marry?" he continued; "you know you would hate a saint if he married her."

"I am sure I should be delighted," said Lady Sunbury, and was fully persuaded that she spoke the truth.

Aubrey smiled.

He spent that day at Ladysrood, and then took his

departure for his own place—Balfrons, in the north. Balfrons was a mighty border castle which had withstood raids and sieges from the days of Hotspur, and it gave its name to the Marquisate which he would inherit on the death of his father, already a very old man of feeble health, who was but seldom seen by the world.

"I wonder what he would do with his life if he allowed himself to do what he wishes?" said Guilderoy, when his cousin had gone.

"He would never leave Balfrons, and he would collect early Latin manuscripts of Virgil," replied Lady Sunbury.

"Almost as dreary a paradise as his present purgatory."

"That is a matter of taste. You prefer to collect a number of erotic memories which soon grow as fusty to you as if they were used tea-leaves."

"They are at least as amusing as old Italian manuscripts."

"Not as harmless," said Lady Sunbury.

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## CHAPTER IV.

THE next day, after his cousin's departure, very early in the forenoon Guilderoy rode out whilst the day was still young. Riding was the only active exercise which pleased him; he rode well, and with great boldness and sureness; his sister sometimes told him that it was the only English taste he possessed. He could ride many miles without passing the limits of his own land, and much of this was the wild moorland lying high and wind-blown between the woods of Ladysrood and the cliffs by the sea. Over the short elastic turf he could gallop for hours and meet no fence, or boundary-mark, or human habitation. The western wind came straight in his face from the Atlantic, and there was nothing but salt water between him and the coast of Maine. The world had been too much with him to leave him great leisure for the enjoyment of nature, but he had a vague feeling for her which resisted the opposing influences of the world, and revived in the force it had had in his boyhood whenever he was alone in the open air, on moor or shore or mountain.

The moor and the shore and the mountain could not hold him very long, but, while it lasted, his sympathy with them was sincere and his pleasure in their loneliness very real. It was not the love of Wordsworth or of Tennyson, but it was genuine in its kind, and gave momentary seriousness and romance to his temperament and his thoughts. In the heart of a man who

loves nature there are always some green places where the caravan wheels of the world have not passed or the hoofs of its carnival coursers trodden.

It was so seldom that he saw anyone or anything on these moors beyond a pedlar or a turf-cutter, a carrier's cart creeping slowly across the track which led from one hamlet to another, or a cottager carrying on her head a bundle of cut furze or a basket of bilberries, that he looked curiously at a little crowd of people which he saw on the edge of the moor, their figures black against the light of the sky. From them, as he drew nearer, there came to his ear an angry screaming noise, the ugly noise of irritated roughs, and he could distinguish the uncouth figures of village lads about whom several lurchers and other dogs were jumping and yelping excitedly. The centre of the excitement was a hut or cabin made of wattles such as was used by the turf-and bog-cutters of the moors; generally such places were only used for shelter in bad weather, but this one was stronger than most, and braced with beams, and had a door of wood, having served as the home of some squatters at one time, though of late it had been empty.

"They are after some barbarous sport or another," thought Guilderoy, as he heard the hoarse shouts. "Torturing some beast, very likely, or perhaps some half-witted human creature."

He turned his horse to the left and rode towards the little mob, which was a very rough one, composed chiefly of lads from the other side of the moors, where the scattered and uncared-for people were more savage and uncouth than those on the domains of Ladysrood.

"Let un fire her out!" he heard one of them cry,



as he rode nearer, and the welcome shout was echoed with noise and glee. "Let un fire her out!"

"Who is she?" asked Guilderoy, "and what are you going to do? What do you mean by your threats about fire?"

The ringleaders looked at him sullenly.

"'Tis the lord," they muttered.

They were some score in number, lads ranging from fifteen to twenty, beetle-browed, coarse-featured, with jaws like their own bulldogs, and small dull savage eyes, items of that enlightened and purified democracy to which is henceforth trusted the realm of Britain.

It was a Saturday morning, and they had nothing useful to do, and so were doing mischief.

"What are you about?" asked Guilderoy again more imperiously.

What struck him as singular was that whilst the young men and their dogs were in uproar, jostling, hallooing swearing and yelping, from the hut not the faintest sound came.

"Have they frightened to death whatever it is they are persecuting?" he thought, with difficulty keeping his horse quiet amidst the hubbub and the menacing gestures of the youths.

"What are you about?" he demanded; "answer me at once. What devilry are you doing?"

He had little doubt that they had hunted in there some poor old creature whom they thought a witch. Witchcraft was firmly believed in on the moors, and often rudely dealt with by village superstition.

Their clamour ceased a little while, and one of them called to him;

"She's shut herself in with it, and it's ours, and we're going to burn 'em both out; she's kept us here fooling us three hours."

"What is it? and who is she?" asked Guilderoy, and he struck with his riding-whip out of the hand of the man who spoke a wooden box of lucifer matches. There was a quantity of dry furze already piled against the wall of the hut, which if set alight would have flared like straw.

They did not reply, but some of them roared like animals deprived of prey which they had thought safe in their jaws.

"Answer me," he repeated; "you know who I am. I have a right to be answered, you are on my land."

"'Tis a tod," one of them shouted, "and we turned it out to hunt it with the dogs, and we'd run it into a cranny, and she come up and catch hold of it and tear away, and we hunted of *her* then, in here, and she's fleet of foot as any hare, and she hied in quick as thought, and banged the door, and barred it, and she's kept us, making fools of us, three hours if one, and she knows we'll burn her out, and she won't give it up, and she knows we bought it at the public at Cherriton for we told her so, and brought it in a bag and turned it down, only it run bad because it's such a little un."

"You have lost a fox-cub, I understand," said Guilderoy when the narrator ceased. "But who is it that you have in there, and that you are brutes enough to want to burn out?"

"It's the young un of Christslea," said the youth sullenly.

"Who do you mean?"

"'Tis the Vernon girl," cried another of the rioters. "She's a spirit she have, but we'll break it. We'll have the tod if we have him roasted."

"You unutterable beasts!" cried Guilderoy, in the passion which cowardice and tyranny together rouse in a man who is both courageous and merciful. "Do you mean to say that there is a child or a girl in there?"

"She went in with the tod," said the lad sullenly; and those around him yelled in chorus, "How dared she go and take the beast and spoil our sport? The tod was ours, not hers. And she cuddled it up in her neck as if it was a baby. We'll burn her out, and then we'll toss up for her," cried another voice, and the suggestion was received with shouts of applause.

"You are on my land, and I am a magistrate," said Guilderoy, controlling with difficulty his fury of disgust as he dismounted, and, holding his plunging horse with one hand, with the other struck the handle of his whip on the door of the hut.

"My dear, do not be alarmed," he said to the unseen occupant within. "These brutes shall not hurt you. Open the door. I will take care of you. I am Lord Guilderoy, and these moors are mine."

A very clear young voice with a tremor in it answered through the door:

"I cannot open it, because if I do they will take the little fox."

"No, they shall not take the cub," said Guilderoy, and he turned to the men. "You have behaved worse than your mongrels, but I will consent to believe that you would have failed to carry out your dastardly and brutal threats. There is a sovereign for the loss of the

cub; now go back to wherever you came from, and do not forget that your miserable sport is illegal on these lands. Go!"

The little mob wavered, growled and swore under its breath; then one of them picked up the gold piece where it lay on the ground to slink off with it unremarked.

"Share fair!" yelled the others, and they fell on him, and wrestling, quarrelling, yelling, and casting shamefaced and sullen glances over their shoulders at "the lord," they slunk away across the moor in the warm amber light of the full noonday.

The ground sloped slightly downwards to the north-east, and thither they went; the rise soon screened their forms from view, though the echo of their voices in rough and fierce dispute came to the ear of Guilderov as he stood by the cabin door.

"Admirable persons to have been made our masters by Act of Parliament!" he thought, as the sullen mutterings of their oaths came to his ear on the westerly wind.

Then he turned to the door of the cabin and rapped on it with the handle of his whip.

"The brutes are gone," he said through the keyhole. "You may come out quite safely."

He heard a wooden bar lifted and dropped; the wooden door opened, and on the threshold in the warm glow of the sunset stood a young girl with a very beautiful face, which was pale but resolute; a Gainsborough face with wide opened questioning eyes and tumbled auburn hair, of which thick waves were escaping from a gipsy-shaped straw hat. A grey woollen

dress was fastened round her waist by a leather belt; it had been obviously made by some simple country sempstress, but there was an aristocracy in the look of the wearer which made him feel that, whoever she might be, she was thoroughbred. She was not nervous or agitated, only pale. She had placed the fox-cub on the ground that she might undo the bar of the door, and the little animal was shivering and trembling behind her. She took it up before she spoke to him.

"You are sure they are gone?" she asked, looking out across the moor.

"Perfectly sure," returned Guilderoy. "But, my dear child, did you not hear them? They were inciting each other to fire the hut."

"Oh yes, I heard them," she replied tranquilly. "I think they would have done it too. They are very rough and savage, those Cherriton people. It was very kind of you to interfere."

"And what would you have done if I had been riding another way, if the fellows had carried out their word? You would ten to one have been burnt alive."

"Oh, perhaps not," she answered. "I daresay they would not have let me be really burnt, they only wanted to frighten me."

"And you would have run the risk rather than give up that cub?"

"Oh yes! I could not have given him up; and, besides, I would never have given in to *them*."

Guilderoy bowed to her with grave respect.

"You have a great courage, and you have another quality growing rarer still—scorn for the mob."

She did not reply to the words.

"I will go now," she said; "and I thank you very much, though I do not know who you are."

"I am a neighbour of yours, I think. I live at Ladysrood."

"Ah, I heard them say 'It's the lord.'"

She looked at him with more attention and interest than before.

"Ladysrood is such a beautiful place they say," she said. "But you are never there. Why are you always away?"

"I really hardly know," he replied; she seemed to him too young to be answered with a compliment. "You see the English climate is so detestable. I dislike rain, and there is scarcely anything else here."

"I do not mind rain at all," she said as she left the cabin, still clasping in her arms the draggled and shivering fox-cub. "Pray do not come with me. Our place is ten miles from here."

"Neither my horse nor I mind ten miles," replied Guilderoy, "and I most certainly insist on being allowed to attend you to your father's gates. Let me carry the cub for you. How is it he is so tame?"

"They take little foxes from their earths and bring them up; and then, when they are a few months old, they are carried out to some waste place and hunted with dogs; not hounds, you know, but any kind of dog. I could tell this was a tame cub by the way it behaved. It did not know how to run; and was not even afraid. The young men chased it and lashed it, and threw pebbles at it to make it run, but it did not know how. Then, when I saw that it got behind a stone, I took it up and would not let them have it, and

I ran as hard as I could, and they ran after me. I got in there just in time to bar the door. Men are so mean," she continued, with the same scorn in her voice. "There was a fox—a grown fox—that the real hounds hunted last year, and he ran down to the shore and took to the sea, and swam—oh, so gallantly! The hounds could not get him nor the hunters; but what do you think some men did who were in a boat, and saw him? They rowed so that they crossed his path, for he was making for a tongue of land, and they beat him to death in the sea with their oars—the cowards! That I saw myself, for I was up above on the cliffs, and I could not do anything to save him."

"Men are very ignoble; and the new worship of humanity has a beast for its god," replied Guilderoy.

She went on walking, holding the little fox to her with both arms. Guilderoy walked beside her, with the bridle of his horse over his arm.

"But how can your father allow you to wander about so far all alone?" he asked, looking at the profile of his companion, and thinking of Romney's Emma Hamilton, which it resembled.

She laughed; a child's careless laughter.

"I do not think he even knows I do roam about; he is so much absorbed in books and papers. He is so good to me—oh so good! but he would never think to ask where I was all day; and, besides, the moors are as safe as our garden. Nothing has ever happened till to-day; and to-day the men would not have annoyed me if I had not taken away their cub. Of course I had no business, really, to take it."

"Why did you, then?"

"Because I would much sooner do wrong—yes, even a crime, I think—than see any helpless little thing hurt. Would not you?"

"Yes, I would, certainly; I like animals. They are great mysteries; and men, instead of endeavouring to win their way into their closed souls, have only beaten the owners of the souls into captivity."

The girl paused a moment, and looked at him earnestly.

"I like you very much," she said, with gravity, as a child of five years old might have said it.

"I am exceedingly pleased," said Guilderoy, inclined to smile; for he was adored and flattered by all women of the great world, and used to the most subtle compliment, the most charming homage. "You have not told me whom I have the honour of speaking to. May I ask what is your father's name?"

"Our name is Vernon. Vernon of Llanarth."

"Is it possible that your father is John Vernon of Llanarth?" he asked, in intense surprise.

He remembered the name, though vaguely. When he had been a very young man the story of Vernon of Llanarth had been the theme of society for a season. He had forgotten it utterly for years; now its memories rose before him, shadowy, but full of reviving interest.

"Yes, he used to be rich, but he lost all his money. It is many years ago. I do not remember his being rich at all. You seem surprised. Did you never know that we were here, then? We are your tenants, I think."

"I know so little of the neighbourhood."



"Yes; and my father says it is very wrong of you. He says you play into the hands of democrats; that at the Radical meetings in the great towns they always cite you as an example of those who have all the fruits of the land without toiling for it, and take their substance from the poor to spend in foreign countries. Why do you?"

"I did not look for a political lecture," said Guilderoy. "I am always having one at home from my sister, and I am not aware that I take any substance from the poor. I believe, on the contrary, that the poor are better off on the lands of Ladysrood than they are anywhere else in the south-west of England. Is it possible that your father holds these opinions? The Vernons were always Whigs, but never Radicals."

"He does not hold them. He is sorry that anyone holds them, and he is sorry that the great nobles who stay away from their estates, as you do, give agitators an excuse to make the people hold them."

"I am not sure that my example would be more edifying if I lived on them. If you will not let me carry that poor little beast for you, will you let me mount you in my saddle? You are tired, though you will not own it, and you will be able to carry the cub much more comfortably for himself, which is no doubt the argument which will have most weight with you."

It was not easy to persuade her, but she did at last consent, and sprang with rapidity on to the horse's back, scarcely touching Guilderoy's hand. He put the little fox up in the saddle in front of her, and, thus

laden, the horse paced slowly over the elastic turf, his master walking at his head.

"What a beautiful child!" thought Guilderoy, as he studied her features and her form. She was tall and lithe, and admirably made, like a young Diana; her feet were small and slim, her throat beautifully set upon her shoulders, all her features were harmonious, and her eyes were so large and lustrous that they would have made a plain face handsome; her expression had a curious mingling of innocence, self-will, candour, pride, intelligence, and childishness; her smile was like sunlight, frank and lovely.

"In a year or two she will be the most beautiful woman in England," he thought, "and what a fine character, too!"

He was not in the habit of noticing young girls at all. He, on the contrary, shunned them. He liked women who amused him, who could treat him *de puissance à puissance*, who could bring into their conflicts with him wit, finesse, and experience. This was the first very young woman of his own rank at whom he had ever seriously looked, and there was something in her which charmed and interested him. The tranquillity in danger which she had showed, and the self-possession and simplicity which were characteristic of her manner seemed to him to be the acme of high breeding, whilst joined to them were a *naïveté* and a childishness only possible to one who had led the simplest of rural lives, and been little amongst women.

He knew the name of John Vernon, though ever since his own boyhood it had been unspoken in his world. He remembered hearing what fine scholarship,

what rare accomplishments, and what elegant dilettanteism had vanished with this man from society when a total and voluntary loss of fortune had sent him into seclusion and oblivion, by the world forgot if not the world forgetting. And this was his child—it was not wonderful, he thought, if she had rare and delicate excellencies both of form and mind.

“And have you always lived here? and on my land?” he asked her, as he led the horse along through the golden haze by the morning sun.

“No, only ten years. We lived by the sea, thirty miles away, first of all. That is what I first remember. The sea ran very high one winter’s night and washed away our house, and my father had only just time to save me and some of the books. I can recollect it. They woke me and carried me out wrapped up in the blankets, and I saw the great wall of water rising up above me; and I heard the crash of the house sinking; yes, I have never forgotten it. I was five years old. My mother died of the cold of that night, and soon after we came to Christslea. My father likes it because it is so solitary, and has such a big old garden. I think we pay you forty pounds a year for it with the orchard.”

“I am shocked not to know my tenants.”

“How should you know any tenant when you are never here?”

“I am here sometimes.”

“Oh, yes, when you have a number of great people, now and then, once in four years. Myself, if I had Ladysrood, I would live there all the year round.”

“How happy Ladysrood and its master would be!”

The compliment made no impression on her.

"I am as happy at Christ'slea," she answered; "but I should like to see your great galleries, and the beautiful ball-room with the frescoes, and that staircase with the carving by Grinling Gibbons—it must be an immense pleasure to own a beautiful old house. I have heard a great deal of yours, though I have never seen it."

"You will now come and see it very often, will you not?"

"It is a long way off, and I have no pony."

"I will send you a team of ponies, or I will come and fetch you myself."

She laughed a little.

"You say that, but you will not do it, because you always go to Italy."

"Perhaps I shall not go to Italy this year."

"Then I will come and see you," said Gladys Vernon frankly.

In such innocent interchange of speech they wended their way across the moor to where the moors became meadow land and orchard land, and a hilly uneven road went up and down between high hedges of bilberry and briony.

"That is our house," she said, as she pointed to some twisted chimneys and a thatched roof rising above a tangle of apple trees, elder trees, and hawthorn trees. The ground all about was orchard, and the strong sweet scent of the ripe fruit filled the air.

Guilderoy stopped his horse at the little wooden gate which she had pointed out to him, overtopped with luxuriant unclipped shrubs, between tall privet hedges.

"You are safe now," he said to her, as she sprung down from the saddle. "I will bid you good-day here, and will call on your father later. Give him my compliments, and say how much I am indebted to the fox-cub for having led me to the knowledge of my tenants."

"You have been very kind," said the girl, with her hand on the latch of the wicket.

"I have been very fortunate," said Guilderoy; "but if you will allow me a parting word of advice, do not wander so far alone. It has ended well this time, but it might end not so well. You are too"—he was about to say too handsome, but checked himself, and said instead—"too young to roam about unattended. Demos is about everywhere, you know. By the way, what will you do with your *protégé*, the cub?"

"I shall keep him in the garden."

"Like Sir Roger de Coverley's hares."

She smiled as at the mention of a dear old friend.

She gave him her hand with another of those smiles which made her more than ever like the Romney, and disappeared into the green twilight of the untrimmed garden ways behind the wicket.

"What a charming child!" he thought; "and she treats me much as she might treat the old carrier who crosses the moors, or the huckster who buys the orchard apples!"

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## CHAPTER V.

"WHERE have you been, my dear, all these hours?" a voice said from the green twilight of the tangled boughs and bushes.

"That is my father! Wait a moment," said the girl. And she pushed the branches aside and ran to him.

Guilderoy heard her rapidly narrating her adventure and speaking of him by name; and in a few moments' time John Vernon came through the leaves and the shadows. He was a slight well-made man, with a scholar's stoop in the shoulders, and a scholar's brow and eyes; he was very pale, and his step was feeble, but he had a smile which was infinitely engaging in its brightness, and there was humour, too, about the delicate lines of his mouth; he had once, like Ulysses, known well the cities and the minds of men.

"My dear Lord Guilderoy," he said, as he stretched out his hand, "I am infinitely obliged to you for having brought home my truant. She is growing much too old to wander like this, but I cannot get her to believe it; and her education, in some ways, has been sadly neglected. Come in the house—your house, by the way—and let me understand better what has happened. Gladys has gone to carry this new *protégé* to the cow's stable."

Guilderoy, won by the tone of the voice which addressed him, followed the speaker indoors, leaving his horse at the gate.

He said something to the effect that whatever the means of education the result obtained was admirable.

"You must not say that," replied her father, with a smile. "You are very kind if you think it, for my poor little girl, though she is not unpossessed of some learning, is wholly ignorant of all that a polite society requires in children of her age, and I make no doubt that she treated you with very scant ceremony. I ought, you know," he continued with a sigh, "to send her to my people to be instructed in all the decencies of society, and brought out into the world. But I hesitate to do so. The child would be wretched amongst a number of distant relatives. I am poor, as you know. She would have to take the position of a Cinderella, and she would not take it; she is too proud, too used to freedom, and, in her own way, to sovereignty, for she does precisely as she pleases in this cottage."

"She has an admirable manner," said Guilderoy, "only such a manner as high-breeding gives untaught. Is it indeed true that I have the honour to be your landlord, Mr. Vernon?"

"Quite true; and we have had your house ten years; it would not suit many people because it is so far away from civilisation, but it does suit me chiefly for that reason. You appear to be very little acquainted with the extent of your property. It is well that you have so good a steward."

"I cannot think it safe for her to be alone," said

Guilderoy. "She has not even a dog with her. Would you allow me to send you a mastiff or a deerhound?"

"There is a dog; we have a fine one; but he had lamed himself, and so was not about with her as usual. No; she must learn to stay within bounds, and pay the penalty of losing the happy immunity of childhood. She will be seventeen in another month. It is your luncheon hour, I imagine. We are primitive people and we dine at this time. If you will stay I shall be very pleased. My old housekeeper can roast a capon, and I have some good Rhenish wine still to offer you. *Divitias miseras.*"

Guilderoy consented with much more willingness than he displayed to the invitations of the great world.

The dining-room was a small, square plain room, which had been coloured grey by a village plasterer; but John Vernon, in idle moods, had covered the walls with classical figures drawn in black and white, and it had a look of good taste, enhanced by the old silver plate on the round dining-table and the autumn flowers set in a grey Flemish pot, which filled the centre.

"When you have only sixpence to spend you may as well buy a well-made thing as an ill-made thing," said John Vernon, as his guest complimented him; "and if you have only Michaelmas daisies and dahlias to set out, you may as well see that they harmonise."

He did the honours of his homely table with perfect grace and simplicity. His guest understood whence the girl had taken her high-bred repose. The repast was very simple; a plain soup, fish fresh from the sea, prawns stewed in sherry, and the capon Vernon had spoken of; but he had seldom enjoyed any banquet



better. The keen air of the moors had given him an unwonted appetite. Gladys had changed her gown to a frock of white serge, and had tied back her abundant hair with a pale ribbon. She spoke very little in her father's presence, but she had so lovely a face, with a colour in her cheeks like that of the wild rose, that Guilderoy almost preferred her silence; it became her youth; and the reverence she showed her father was touching and uncommon in days when English girls are chiefly conspicuous by their insolence and their forwardness. However self-willed or high-spirited she might be to others, to John Vernon she was gracefully deferential and submissive in an unusual degree.

He was stirred to a novel sympathy with this lonely, scholarly gentleman, shut away from the world under the boughs of Somerset apple orchards, and the child who had the beauty of the Romney Hamilton and the life of a young peasant. Her personal beauty pleased him; the one as much as the other. She knew nothing of the complications of life; she had lived on these lonely moors, as Miranda on her isle, and she had the intrepidity and the *independence* of a Rosalind.

"Are you never dull here?" he asked her.

"Oh, never," the child answered, with some indignation. "There is the garden, and the orchard, and I have a great many books, and I have a boat all my own down on the sands. If people are dull," she added with the happy certainty of youth, "they must be stupid themselves."

"I am often dull," said Guilderoy. "I do not wish to accept your theory of the cause of it."

"Why should you be dull? Have you had any misfortune?"

"One big one, perhaps."

"The death of any one?"

Her voice was full of ready sympathy.

"Oh, no; only that I enjoyed all things too early, and too completely; a reason with which you would have no patience, even if you could understand it, which you could not."

"My father says when we cannot have understanding we should at least have indulgence."

"A gentle doctrine; few practise it. Would you be indulgent to me?"

"Gladys does not understand how you can want indulgence," said John Vernon. "The lord of Ladysrood seems to her to be higher and happier than kings."

"When will you bring her to Ladysrood?"

"We never leave home."

"You must make an exception for me," said Guilderoy, as he saw how the child's face changed in a moment from eager expectation to disappointment.

"We are hermits," replied Vernon. "I have forgotten what the outer world is like, and Gladys has never seen a glimpse of it. We count time by the blossoming and the gathering of our rennets and king pippins. There are more unpoetical ways of reckoning its flight. I forgot; we have a sun-dial, but it stands in the shade and is no use to us, like some people's lives to their possessors.

"Please do not suggest discontent here," he added in a low tone. "It is the curse of modern life. As

yet it has not passed this little wicket, and I shall thank you not to raise the latch for it."

"Forgive me," said Guilderoy; "I spoke thoughtlessly. I should indeed regret a meeting which has given me so much pleasure if I were the means of letting a snake creep into your orchard grass."

He found in his host the most captivating of companions. Although long self-exiled from the world, Vernon had lost none of his interest in its changing fortunes; a great scholar, he yet had no disdain for the topics of the hour, and from his solitude under the apple-boughs of his orchard had never ceased to follow with keen eyes the movements and the portents of the political world. He was pleased to find himself once more in the company of a man of the world, and his conversation fascinated and interested his guest in no little degree; it had a flavour as rare and as pure as the old wine which he had brought up from his cellar.

After dinner they sat awhile in the little garden overhung with reddening leaves and full of autumnal blossoms. The sun had come out and shone on the warm, red brick-work of the cottage where the thickness of the ivy parted. Guilderoy was unwilling to take his departure; the scene was novel though simple, and his newly-made acquaintances aroused his interest. Moreover, John Vernon talked well, with a depth of thought, an aptness of quotation, and a freshness of opinion which had its charm, and would have had it, even had his guest not had always before his eyes the picture of Gladys seated a little way off on a beehive chair, with the head of the lame dog leaning fondly against her knee. With reluctance he left Christslea as

the clock in the church tower half a mile off tolled four.

He was pleased, interested, and angered with himself that such a man should have been resident on his own lands so long and wholly unknown to and unnoticed by him. As he rode through the cold, dusky shadows of the moors, fitfully lighted by a moon which played at hide and seek with the clouds, he saw always before him the child's face of Gladys Vernon, with its brilliant resolute eyes, which grew so soft when she looked at her father.

"Since I must marry, why not marry her?" he thought with a complex impulse, made up half of physical attraction and half of a higher admiration.

## CHAPTER VI.

GUILDEROV made a brief apology to his sister for being so late, and sat down to dinner; throughout it he was silent and abstracted. When the coffee had been brought and the servants had withdrawn, he said abruptly, as he walked up and down the room:

"You say a woman is wanted in this house. Well, I have seen one whom I shall marry."

"Good heavens!" cried Lady Sunbury, as she rose from her chair in the intensity of her amazement.

"At least she is a child," he added.

"A child! I suppose you mean some jest. I am so stupid that I cannot guess the point of it."

"No; I am not joking at all. I have seen a per-

fectly beautiful person whom I am disposed to marry. I imagined that you would be pleased," replied Guilderoy, which showed that, despite his experience in women, he knew but little of their characters.

"Good heavens!" cried Lady Sunbury again. "Is it a turf-cutter's daughter, or one of the gypsies?"

"No; it is neither. Do not alarm yourself. She is the daughter of John Vernon, a very noble gentleman who has been living here ten years without my knowing it."

"As you never take the trouble to visit your neighbours——"

"I shall visit one neighbour to-morrow and take you with me."

"Good heavens!" said Lady Sunbury a third time. "You actually speak as if you were serious!"

"I am quite serious."

He proceeded to tell her the story of the fox-cub and the cabin.

She listened with astonishment in her eyes mingled with a look of strong censure. She saw nothing but absurdity in it. She was a courageous woman and a humane one, but neither quality as evinced in the narrative touched her. It seemed to her high-flown, idiotic, altogether in bad taste.

"Girls who live with their fathers alone always run so wild and become so queer," she said, when he had ended his tale. It was the only remark which she considered it called for from her.

Guilderoy laughed, with some sense of anger.

"What ill-natured things a woman always contrives

to say! I should have thought the fine courage of the child would have pleased you."

"I suppose she is pretty?" she inquired stiffly and with significance.

He laughed again.

"She is very handsome," he answered. "You will see her to-morrow. We will go over to Christslea."

"How very impetuous you are! One would think you were a boy of eighteen!"

"It is delightful to be stirred to impetuosity. It is a relic of youth. I feel very young since five o'clock this evening."

"It is really intolerable!" said Lady Sunbury; she could not yet bring herself to believe that he was in earnest.

"You must remember the story of Vernon of Llanarth better than I, since you are older than I. You were in the world at the time and I was a boy."

"I have no recollection," said his sister coldly, annoyed at the allusion to her increasing years.

"You will have, if you think a moment. He was a very clever and popular man, a great scholar, and rich; all the family are rich; and he gave up everything he possessed, wholly, voluntarily, and with magnificent magnanimity, to dower the widows and orphans of four hundred men who were drowned by an underground river bursting into a coal mine which he possessed in South Wales. He considered that he had been to blame in never visiting a property which was on a portion of his lands, and that if he had given more personal attention to it his engineers and superintendents would have been more vigilant, and the catastrophe might not

have occurred, as the weakness of the side next the river would have been known and provided for. The mine itself was totally destroyed, of course—an immense loss to him; and he gave up all the rest of his fortune to provide for over a thousand helpless people. Everyone called him a madman; but neither the world nor his family changed his intentions. He disappeared from society, and has maintained himself ever since, I believe, by writing for scientific and historical reviews and other learned works. When I heard his name I remembered the generosity and quixotism of an action which I very much admired in my boyhood.”

“It was no more than his duty,” remarked Lady Sunbury, coldly, when his enthusiasm was spent.

“And how many of us do our duty?” said Guilderoy. “And is it not always easy to find sophistries which will relieve us of it? I do not believe either that it was anything so cold as a sense of duty; it was a gentleman’s instinct to suffer anything rather than let others suffer through him.”

The heritage of such fine and sensitive honour as Vernon’s seemed to Guilderoy the richest dower that any young girl could bring with her to any race; and he said so with some vehemence and reproach.

“You are always Athenian in knowing what is right,” said Lady Sunbury, dryly. “Certainly you would be the last man on earth to do anything in any way similar.”

“I do not presume to pretend that I should. But if there be one thing which I admire more than another,” said Guilderoy angrily, “it is men who sacrifice themselves to what they consider the duties of property.

John Vernon did it; Aubrey does it; I do not do it because I have neither the force of character nor the strength of belief which would move me to do it. But I admire it; and when I saw John Vernon to-day, I saw a hero."

"Because the hero has a good-looking daughter!"

"What a disagreeable person you can be, Hilda!"

"When I do not flatter you."

"No. I detest flattery; when you throw cold water on any rare enthusiasm which may be fortunate enough to revive in one's chilled soul."

"You are generally enthusiastic when you have seen a new face which pleases you for the moment."

"Here it was courage which pleased me quite as much as beauty."

"He has been here ten years, and the cottage is rented at forty pounds," continued Guilderoy with anger at himself. "He must have paid me actually four hundred pounds! Good heavens! A man to whom I should have been charmed and honoured to give the best estate that I possess rent free!"

"Many things may happen on our properties that we regret, if we never inquire into what is done on them," said his sister coldly.

"Pray spare me a sermon; I had one yesterday from Aubrey, and one from this child to-day. After all, Mr. Vernon would certainly not consent to live rent free however much I wished it; and had I been aware he was there, perhaps he would not have stayed. He will know no one, they say."

"All is for the best, no doubt," said Lady Sunbury in a tone which strongly suggested the contrary. "If



he had known the county people like a reasonable being, his daughter would not have been likely to interest you by her adventures."

When the morning came she declined to go to Christslea.

"Whatever follies he may commit now or hereafter they shall not have my countenance," she said to herself in that spirit of which women of her character consider the display to be due to their dignity and their families. Guilderoy restrained a passionate inclination to use the same language to her that her husband did, and went over to Christslea alone.

Lady Sunbury remained at home, having done what prudence and dignity required of her. Yet she had an uneasy consciousness that more real prudence, if less dignity, might have been shown in accompanying her brother.

She might have prevented or mitigated some folly. Anxiety and apprehension made her restless, and she wandered in a desultory manner, wholly unlike her usual energy and decision, to and fro through the great house which had been her birthplace, from whose future mistress, whosoever she might be, she would exact such superhuman and innumerable virtues.

She could not believe, seriously, that Guilderoy would make himself so utterly absurd as he had threatened, and yet intimate knowledge of his character had told her that on occasion he could be capable of dangerous and incredible *coups de tête*; a weakness inherited from the warm Gascon blood of his mother's race.

Indolent, nonchalant, and easily swayed as he was

usually, he became at such moments both strong-willed and deaf to all argument and persuasion.

"Any woman who has to pass her life with him will need the wisdom of the serpent and the gentleness of the dove," she thought, mournfully conscious that remarkably few women ever possess either.

Lady Sunbury never perceived why it was that she utterly failed herself to influence the men belonging to her; but she had much perception into the character of other women, and she saw clearly enough the causes of their failures.

Meanwhile she passed the forenoon pacing up and down the numerous galleries and salons of Ladysrood.

In the middle of the morning she sent for the land steward, and interrogated him as to the occupants of Christslea.

All that he told her only served to make her more angry, because it made the quixotic folly of Guilderoy assume a more possible shape. She heard that John Vernon was of irreproachable character if of eccentric habits, and that the causes of his poverty were of the highest honour to him.

"There is a child, is there not—a daughter?" she asked.

"There is. I have seen her occasionally. She promises to be very handsome," replied the steward, wondering whither these questions tended.

"But very odd, is she not?"

"Not more so than any young girl must be who is educated by a recluse, and deprived of all the natural amusements and companionships of her age and sex."

"I understand," said Lady Sunbury, with a shudder.

She could see the girl exactly as she was: a wild creature without gloves, her brain filled very likely with godless philosophies, and her hair never properly brushed; handsome, no doubt, or Guilderoy would never have looked at her or thought twice about her, but untrained, impudent, and irreligious.

Guilderoy meanwhile was riding through the woods and across the moorland to the modest residence of John Vernon.

He was so possessed with one idea, one desire, that the folly of his errand altogether failed to occur to him; the possibility of its end being disappointment and dismissal never passed through his mind. All his life women had taught him and told him that the offer of his hand would be a favour which could only be met by the most ardent gratitude. It was not vanity which moved him, but the sense that he had a great gift to give, and one which no living woman would reject.

As he rode his thoughts grew fervid, and his imagination heated; he saw ever before him the face of Gladys Vernon, and a thousand excited emotions rose in him as he rode through the brilliant wind-moved autumn air.

He was certainly about to commit an unspeakable absurdity in offering his whole future to a child whom he had seen but once the day before. But the absurdity of his intentions did not strike him; he was too enamoured of the poetry and romance of them, and the opposition of his sister had stimulated him to a promptness of action far from common to an indolent and undecided temperament.

When he sent in his card at Christ'slea, he was at once ushered into the back study, which John Vernon used, a small room made dusky by the ivy which shrouded the window, and with books lying five or six deep on the floor, while crowded bookcases lined each of the four walls.

"This is very kind to come so soon again to a solitary," said Mr. Vernon with his pleasant smile.

Guilderoy pressed his hand and answered without any preface whatever:

"It is you who will, I hope, be kind to me. My dear sir, I come to beg from you the honour of your daughter's hand in marriage."

"What! Good God, are you out of your mind?" cried John Vernon: he fell backward a few paces and stared at his visitor with the blank stupidity of a bewildered and incredulous amazement; he had always heard that his neighbour of Ladysrood was capricious and eccentric. Was he left now, he asked himself, in the presence of a madman?

"It is not complimentary either to her or to me that you should be so greatly astonished," said Guilderoy with annoyance. "Allow me to repeat my words. I have come over this morning to solicit the honour of your daughter's hand. My position is known to you, and on my character, though it might not satisfy precisians, you will not find any very serious stain. I venture to think that my proposals may not be altogether intolerable to you."

"It is not that," said John Vernon, still breathless. "It is—it is—the child is a child—she is not of marriageable years, she is a baby—and good Heavens!

you have only seen her for ten minutes yesterday. My dear Lord Guilderoy, if this be not a joke; if it be not part of some comedy, of some enigma to which I have not the key——”

“Can you suppose that I should insult you by jests on such a subject? I was never more serious in my life.”

“Then I must gratefully and respectfully decline the honour you propose to do myself and my daughter,” replied John Vernon with the tone and air of a person who closes a subject which cannot be reopened.

“Why?” asked Guilderoy, coldly.

“Why?”—Vernon repeated the word in vague bewilderment. “Why? Why, I have a thousand reasons. I have said, she is the merest child. She knows nothing of you; you know nothing of her. How can you ask me why? My dear lord, it is a kind of insanity. I may appear discourteous and ungrateful in declining your overtures so abruptly, but it is in truth a question which does not bear discussion.”

“Every question bears discussion if it carries no insult with it, and you cannot consider that my desires insult you,” replied Guilderoy, who controlled his temper with effort.

“Insult—no. I am sure you do not mean it as that,” said Vernon, infinitely amazed, troubled, and annoyed. “But the mere idea is intolerable, insane, preposterous. You were kind to a child yesterday, and this morning you wish to marry her. Good God! it is only a few months ago that she was a baby playing with a toy lamb. My dear Lord Guilderoy, if indeed you are serious, this is midsummer madness. You have

eaten of the drug of Love in Idleness, and Titania and her crew have played with you. Go home and laugh at your freak to-morrow, and thank the Fates that I am not a man to take you at your word and keep you to it. Good day."

"I shall not go away until I have received from you such answer as I wish," replied Guilderoy. The unlooked-for opposition fanned his new desires into double warmth.

"As a visitor you are most welcome to my house, but it is the only welcome I can give to you," replied Vernon. "I doubt my own senses when I think of the things you have said, of the amazing errand on which you have come here. I still feel as if it must be only in jest that you are speaking, some jest of which I am as yet too stupid to see the point."

"My dear sir," said Guilderoy impatiently, "you think me very ill-bred if I could possibly presume to jest on such a subject. I have never seen anyone marriageable whom I admire so much as I admire your daughter, and I told my sister last evening that I should come here to solicit her hand in all seriousness."

"Her hand! She is a baby I tell you. A little rustic. A mere country mouse, with not a penny to her fortune."

"The daughter of Mr. Vernon, of Llanarth, has one heritage at least which kings might envy," said Guilderoy with his courtliest grace and an accent of reverent sincerity.

"I thank you," said Vernon with some emotion.

He had never supposed that anyone remembered

an act which had always seemed to him very simple and always absolutely enjoined by duty and honour.

"But there is nothing more for me to do," he added, "than in all seriousness to reply that I must with regret decline the honour of the alliance which you propose to me."

The face of Guilderoy flushed with anger and offence.

"I repeat that you cannot refuse to allege your reasons, at least."

"Certainly not: they are simple and obvious. The child is too young, and you are a stranger to us both."

"If these be your only reasons they are both defects which time will cure, if you will allow me the privilege of intimacy here."

John Vernon, vexed, perplexed, and uncertain how to reply to so much persistency, drew lines with a paper-knife on the blotting-paper before him and was silent. He did not approve of what he had heard of the lord of Ladysrood; the various stories of the country-side depicted Guilderoy as strange, capricious, and negligent of the duties of his station; but, on the other hand, he was admired and esteemed in that great world which John Vernon had once known so well, and no graver sins than those of caprice and self-indulgence had ever been attributed to him; he might have been a voluptuary, but he had always been a man of honour. It was difficult to reject such a suitor, and yet he was wholly determined to reject him inexorably.

"Give him Gladys!" he thought; "why, he would tire of her in three days!"

"I know what you are thinking," said Guilderoy

abruptly. "You are thinking that I should treat her ill. I should not; I do not treat women ill even when they annoy and weary me. There is not a woman living who could complain of my want of regard for her even when she had lost all power to please me. On your daughter I will make any settlement that you please, and place it entirely out of my power to injure her were I inclined——"

"To injure her materially—yes, I do not fear that you would ever do that. But there are so many things that none can promise to do or not to do; we may control our actions but we cannot control our feelings, and we often make others unspeakably wretched through no fault whatever of our own; against the wounds of the affection no possible guarantee can be ever given; the laws of marriage are constructed on the absurd idea that it is possible to do so, and that is why marriage is the almost universal failure that we see it is. But you do not want a disquisition, you want an answer. My dear lord, I can only repeat what I said before, that I thank you for the compliment you pay me, that I apologise to you if astonishment made me appear discourteous, but that what you wish is wholly and for ever impossible."

Guilderoy rose and bowed with a faint smile:

"Forever is a large word. You tempt me to deceive and to defy you, and to endeavour to make what I wish wished also by your daughter against your wish. You refuse me; but you could not refuse her."

John Vernon looked up startled and impatient: "You mean that you will make love to the child unknown to me? It is possible. She is not a prisoner.



But I doubt very much if, with all your power over her sex and your experience of them, you would be able to persuade her to have any secret whatever from me."

"Why force me to try then?" said Guilderoy. "I come to you in all openness and fairness. If you will let me visit you on the footing of friendship, I will take no advantage of it without your knowledge and concurrence. But I shall hope, of course, in time to convert you—and her—to my views."

John Vernon threw his paper-knife down with a roughness rare in so gentle a person and walked to the window. In a few moments he turned to his visitor: "I suppose it must be as you wish," he said unwillingly. "But give me your word that if I admit you here you will take no advantage of it; that you will not see the child out of my presence."

"I promise that," replied Guilderoy. And he was himself astonished at the sudden intensity and warmth which his own desires had obtained from the fanning wind of opposition.

"I am perfectly certain that you will not keep in the same inclinations," added Vernon. "It is wildly improbable that you should do so, and I cannot permit the mind of as young a girl as Gladys to be disturbed by ideas of which she has no more thought at present than any one of the red deer fawns on your moorlands. I am sure you will understand that I should prefer that you dismissed this strange fancy altogether from your own mind, and accepted once and for all my rejection of your proposals; but, if you will not do that, all I can admit is that you should come here occasionally as my landlord and neighbour without allowing the

child to have any suspicion of any ulterior motive in your visits."

"Your stipulations are humiliating," said Guilderoy, "but I suppose I must accept them."

He was amused despite his annoyance at the unwillingness with which his proposals were received. No one else in all the world, he thought, would have failed to accept them with ardour and gratitude. John Vernon's attitude moved him to respect and esteem. Here was at least one man to whom the good things and the great ones of the world were as dross.

He left Christslea a few moments later without seeking to see Gladys that day.

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## CHAPTER VII.

WHEN he met Lady Sunbury in the small Queen Anne drawing-room before dinner she was infinitely too proud and too offended to ask him any question, though inquisitiveness and anxiety were never so strained well-nigh to bursting in the breast of woman. Guilderoy, however, did not keep her very long in suspense.

"You will be very glad for me to pass the winter here instead of in Italy," he said, as he took his cup of tea. "That is what I am going to do."

Lady Sunbury was not glad. Human nature is full of contradictions.

"You will never pass the winter here!" she said, with some violence. "Never. For you will never keep in the same mood or the same mind for two weeks!"

"I shall keep in this," he answered. "And you will oblige me very much if you will drive over to Christslea to-morrow. John Vernon is quite a respectable person, though he has lost all his money; indeed, more respectable perhaps than if he had multiplied it."

"And why should I call on Mr. Vernon?" said Lady Sunbury, holding a feather screen between her and the wood fire with an unamiable and ominous look upon her high straight delicate features.

"Only because it is usual in the conventional state

of the world to do that sort of thing," said Guilderoy, carelessly, "and I shall marry his daughter in February: I told you last night that I should do so."

His sister was silent for a few moments. Her lips turned pale with rage.

"And I do not even know her!" she said, in a suffocated voice.

"Really that is no one's fault but yours," said Guilderoy. "I asked you to drive there this morning and you refused. I do not know her very much myself."

"You must be mad!"

"So Mr. Vernon said, but I believe not; of course, one can never be quite sure. There are insidious lesions in the brain which do not declare themselves. Many statesmen's actions which appear unaccountable are really caused by unsuspected protognosis——"

Lady Sunbury interrupted him passionately.

"Do you mean to tell me, with all this fooling, that you are about to enter on the most serious act of your life with less consideration than you would show in buying a dog?"

"It is not so very serious," murmured Guilderoy. "It used to be thought so in old-fashioned days, but not now."

"Do you mean that you marry only to abandon your wife in a week?"

"Mr. Vernon said three days. Nobody abandons their wife nowadays, I think, except working-men who empty the savings out of the tea-caddy and go off to Australia."

"If Mr. Vernon, whatever else he be, is a man of

the slightest sense, he will forbid so abnormal, so unnatural, so insensate a folly."

"Mr. Vernon has all the will in the world to forbid it; but his power is not equal to his will."

"What! Does he feel no gratitude, no sense of honour received, no consciousness of the immense compliment you pay him?"

"You are exacting. You desire him at once to be servile and furious. He was neither. He had an admirable manner for which I respect him, and a very slight opinion of myself, with which I do not quarrel. My dear Hilda, do not force me to quarrel with *you*. It would be so much to be regretted. I abhor dissensions, and if they are forced on me I do not very soon forget them. If a man, well-born and well bred, has a charming child, who is both lovely and innocent, he would surely not be guilty of the intolerable vulgarity of thinking her the inferior of any suitor who could present himself. What I desire to do may be, as you say, an insensate folly. Very possibly it is, and that I shall tell you so one day, when you will have the only mortal happiness which never palls—the pleasure of being in the right. But at present leave me to my illusions. You may be quite sure they will not last long. You have never approved of my ways of life. You probably never will approve of them, whether I take the paths of virtue or the paths of vice."

Lady Sunbury sat silent, pale, and stern. She would at all times with any other person pour out in pitiless *crescendo* the most bitter and violent reproaches, and bear off the triumph of the last word at any cost. But with Guilderoy she was conscious that there were

limits which she could not pass and retain his affection; that a quarrel, if forced upon him, would have no reconciliation possible summoned in its train. The sense of that certainty restrained her bitterest words, for in her own manner she loved him almost more than she loved the sons that she had borne.

"Of course it is all a jest," she said, with much self-control, as she rose and moved away; but her lips quivered with anger, and her eyes were dark with it.

"Not in the least a jest," replied Guilderoy, but he said it carelessly, and did not pursue the theme, which was mentioned no more between them that evening.

In the morning Lady Sunbury received her letters in her own room; there was nothing of the very smallest importance in them. They consisted of circulars, petitions, political gossip, with a little note from one of her sons at Eton asking for fifty pounds; but they sufficed her as an excuse, and she sent word to her brother that she was extremely sorry, but news had reached her that morning which would oblige her to go home at once, taking London on her way.

"I am extremely sorry too," Guilderoy wrote on a slip of paper. "But you know I always wish you to please yourself."

And she went at noonday.

"I wonder you have not more curiosity," he said with a smile, as he bade her farewell on the steps of the terrace.

She deigned to give no reply. But she had not gone many miles upon her homeward way before she became conscious of how utterly her usually ever-present wisdom of judgment had played her false at this

moment. If pride had not forbade it, she would gladly have returned.

As the train swept round a bend on the rocks she saw in the distance the grey spires and towers of Ladysrood rising from their reddening forests and purple moorlands, with the soft sunlit mist of the September morning shrouding the hills at their back. Little given to such emotions as she was, Lady Sunbury saw them through another mist, which was of tears.

"There is one consolation, however," she thought; "even if there were anything serious in what he said, one week of wet November weather will drive this fancy from his thoughts and see him in Paris going southward. He will no more endure an English winter than the nightingales."

And yet she regretted more and more that she had left Ladysrood with such precipitancy as the train flew on farther and farther over the breezy downs and wooded wolds of Somerset and Wilts.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE days which succeeded the departure of his sister were the quietest which Guilderoy had ever passed in the whole course of his life. He had too effectually slighted and rejected the society of his county for anyone of his neighbours to venture to intrude on him. He was disinclined to invite any guest male or female: the evenings found him sitting alone at dinner and reading alone in his library afterwards; twice or

thrice a week he rode over to Christslea. He was astonished himself at the attraction the place had for him, at the force with which this caprice being opposed had now become the one present object of his life. He had given his word to John Vernon not to attempt to speak to the child save in his presence, and he kept his word; but the restriction annoyed him, and by its annoyance stimulated the fancy which had entered into him until it became something kindred to passion.

Gladys Vernon captivated his imagination; his ideal had always turned towards some mind wholly untainted by the world; some character fresh and candid and untouched by conventionality. He had created in imagination a thousand qualities from women which he had never found in them; he had wanted at once passion and purity, high spirit and submission, romance and ignorance of all the emotions which make up romance; he had desired innumerable utterly opposed and contradictory instincts and characteristics. Only in this child he found, or at the least he fancied that he found, them united. Her courage, her indifference and her physical beauty were great, and the unstudied indifference and frank repose of her habitual manner attracted his taste and stimulated his vanity.

Her eyes were as unclouded, her cheeks as cool, her candour and her serenity as undisturbed, as when he first crossed the moorland with her; to move her from this repose became to him a matter of intense moment and interest: a pleasure which he could not deny himself.

Vernon was very proud. He felt as bitterly as



though it were some merited indignity the certainty of all that those who had once known him would say of the marriage of his daughter to such a man as Guilderoy. The world always attributes bad motives, and to the world it would naturally appear that he had chosen his residence at Christslea with the ulterior view of gaining his landlord's title for his only and portionless child.

For a thousand intensely personal reasons his pain and irritation at Guilderoy's proposals were most sincere, and even for his child's own sake he would have infinitely preferred that her path in life should lie in those quieter and more obscure ways in which he honestly believed the most content and the least temptation to lie for any woman. But opposition and warning only increased the desires and determination of a character which was used to immediate attainment of all wishes with little consideration of who or what might pay for them.

All the water which Vernon strove to throw on the fires of this unreasonable caprice only served to increase them. From being slightly enamoured Gladys' suitor became ardently in love. He never once saw her out of her father's presence, and John Vernon would permit him to offer her no present or homage of any kind.

"I have told you," he said to Guilderoy, "more than once that you will not keep in the same mind over the turn of the year, and I will not consent to your sowing the seeds of ever so slight a regret in the heart of the child. Youth is short enough, you know, without its being cut prematurely in two by the knife

of disillusion. She might care nothing at all for you, but on the other hand she might care much. She has no idea of what the emotions of life are, and she shall not make their acquaintance first through pain. You are one of those who love and ride away; you can ride away as soon as you please, but love here you shall not make."

The doubt of his stability and sincerity so often expressed stung Guilderoy into becoming more stable and more sincere than he had ever been in his life. It was not the result John Vernon either contemplated or desired, although it was one for which the waywardness of human nature might have prepared him. But he had a little forgotten what human nature was like, living in his hermitage under the orchard boughs. He had lived so entirely with the great spirits of the dead that poor modern humanity, so fluctuating, so fitful, so effeminate and so little reasonable, scarcely commanded his sympathies or his understanding. Guilderoy seemed to him a man unequal to the great position and responsibilities to which he had been called by fate. He honestly disliked the notion of giving over to him the future and the happiness of his young daughter. "He would not treat her ill; no, certainly not; nor with any roughness or cruelty," he mused; "but there are so many other ways of making a woman's heart ache, and the child herself has her faults. She is not easy to control or to understand, and then she is so terribly young. Ten years hence she will be only at the age when most women begin their life."

Thus he received his landlord and neighbour with little cordiality, though he could not resist on his own

part a certain sympathy with which Guilderoy inspired him personally. "If I were a woman I should be in love with him," he thought; "but not being a woman I see him as he is, and he has all the defects of his generation. He mistakes the senses for the passions, culture for wisdom, pessimism for philosophy, and languor for superiority to ambition. It is the stuff of which patricians are always made in a decadence. It is interesting but it is powerless. Demos reigns over it, and it avenges itself with an epigram instead of drawing a sword."

"You think ill of me," said Guilderoy to him once at Christslea.

"No," said John Vernon; "that is far too strong an expression. You are what you cannot help being—you are the issue of a time which does not produce great men."

"I have certainly no pretension to be great," said Guilderoy, not flattered.

"That is what I complain of. You ought to have more than the pretension—you should have the inner sense, the intimate persuasion that you are bound to be so. Why does aristocracy everywhere recede before the mob? Because aristocracy has lost faith in itself. In England the Whig nobles began the surrender. They have been unable to stop half-way. They have been compelled to put the Phrygian Cap on their heads."

"I see no difference between Whigs and Tories or between Tories and Radicals," said Guilderoy. "They both and all spend their lives in buttering parsnips and offering them on their knees to the mob. I will not

prepare such a platter, and therefore I have never entered public life."

"Public life in England is a very poor thing, that I grant," said Vernon; "but it used to be a very grand thing, and if its nobility had been true to itself it might perhaps have been so still. Democracy is uninteresting, unintelligent, untrustworthy, illogical. The doctrine of the supremacy of mere numbers can never be either admirable or stable. The crowd is like the mud and sand of a foul sea shore—impotent to hold, powerful only to stifle. I quite agree with you, I wholly agree with you, that when a great Nobility took off its hat to the mud and the sand, and said 'We are your servants,' it deserved to be kicked as it is being kicked by its master."

"Why blame me for not doing it, then?"

"I am not aware that I ever did blame you. I quite admit that where public life has become such a parody of government that the Premier must scream like a Dulcamara, or every Minister make a tour of the provinces like a negro minstrel, it has come to such a pass that the scholar must scorn, and the gentleman must shun, and the proud men of every class refuse it. But I say that a time which makes its statesmen mountebanks, and would send a Pitt and a Burke, if it had them, to be only the mouthpieces of a caucus, is a time which can produce nothing great; and in which its nobles, if they are too proud to be delegates, become inevitably what you are."

"And what is that?"

"A man perfectly accomplished and perfectly use-

less, to whom property is a burden and the world a dull comedy."

Guilderoy's face flushed slightly.

"I do not dispute the justice of your verdict. My sister, Lady Sunbury, is always telling me the same things; so is my cousin Aubrey. But what would you have me do? Public life, you yourself admit, justifies my dislike of it. I have no genius with which to make myself remarkable. My property is left to those who have much more talent for managing it than I have. What do you call being useful? Breeding prize-cattle? opening town-halls? lecturing on poetry to the most unpoetical race on earth? sending youths to the university who will live to regret that they were ever taken from the plough? giving money to build palaces of pleasure and art for the most ludicrous and coarsest democracy that ever made pleasure loathsome and art grotesque, who would play Aunt Sally with the Venus of Milo, and grin in horseplay at the Laocoon? or yielding up good land out of fear to be cut up into chess-boards of vegetables to appease the labouring man, in the illogical belief that people hungering for all I have will be contented because out of cowardice I offer them a cabbage? Which of these things do you think is useful? I beg leave to doubt that any of them would be. Everything which men of my order do of this kind is done out of fear. It is a motive by which I will not be inspired. They are like children trying to make a dyke against a flood with wooden spades. The flood is coming on us, and we shall not escape it, but we may at least await it with dignity. To consent to fell your ancestral oaks that Hodge may plant a cabbage

the more in its place is not dignified, and it will do nothing against the deluge."

"You should say that to the country," reflected John Vernon, as Guilderoy continued with some warmth:

"The Greeks only let their helots loose once a year; we have given ours every day of the year, whether feast or fasting. Never before was there such abject abdication of birth, breeding, property, and learning before ignorance and greed, and the sheer brute force of numbers. I do not think that any human force can arrest the ugly rush down hill of democracy when once it has begun, but I think that we may abstain from degrading ourselves by swearing that we consider it a heavenward flight. Democracy is envy—envy of every kind of distinguished excellence. There is nothing noble, stimulating, or heavenwardly about it; men only pretend that there is, to obtain a little ephemeral and fictitious popularity. I do not suppose I am what is called a Tory, for I care nothing at all about the House of Hanover or the Church of England, but I do care about the supremacy of the fittest, and I do not recognise the fittest in the howling mob of a manufacturing city, or the crowds of hinds gathered at a hiring."

"I am altogether with you," said John Vernon, "but I should like you to show them that you are of the fittest. Living in Italy, making love to innumerable women, and buying statues and pictures, do not prove it."

"If I distressed myself ever so I should not affect the result," said Guilderoy. "All the public functions of English life are become grotesque. Parliamentary

government compels every statesman to be nothing but a delegate. There is no real leadership possible. Even the great Cecil is compelled to bawl to mass-meetings. Public speaking has extinguished statesmanship. Can you imagine a Richelieu or a Warwick, a Sully or a Halifax, consenting to scream out the explanation of his projects and his motives to a mob? Would the solitary of Varzin rule Europe as he does if he had to solicit the applause of Bremen porters, and describe his designs to Lübeck cloth-sellers? What nation in the mass could ever be capable of comprehending the delicacy, the intuition, and the prophetic vision which alone make up great statecraft? What mob could ever be able to measure the unseen forces of life, the science of history, the powers which govern men? None; and democracy, instead of being an era of peace, will be an eternity of little peddling wars, because nothing is so productive of war as ignorance, and then each little war will be hurried up and ended in a disgraceful and costly peace, because nothing is so soon frightened as a crowd, and no one is so willing to spend as a mob which pays no taxes."

"Quite true," said Vernon. "But I wish you would say this in the Lords, and not only in this garden."

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## CHAPTER IX.

VERNON had been very unwilling to visit Ladysrood. He had refused continual invitations and entreaties from its owner. But at the last his own wishes were overborne by the wishfulness of his daughter to see the place which had so long filled so large a place in her childlike imagination. He could not resist the mute entreaty of her eyes, longing and expressive as a dog's, and at last, in the ruddy autumn weather, he consented to be driven over the moors and through its forest to the great lime-tree avenues which led to the front entrance of the house.

The light sparkled over the sculptured pinnacles, the high metal roofs, and the lofty towers of the composite but noble pile, and the whole residence wore an air of welcome and gaiety as they entered it.

Vernon sighed impatiently, as he stood in the great central quadrangle. Could not the master of this palace find some suitable mate in all the nobilities of Europe, that he must needs come and take a lonely man's one ewe-lamb? His was not a selfish nature, but his heart hardened within him at what seemed to him the wanton waywardness of Guilderoy's caprice.

It was a brilliant day, though cold, and the reddened woods were glowing in a sun less pale than usual in an English autumn. The great house had



the sunshine sparkling on all its many casements, and on its pinnacles, and crockets, and spires, and on the folds of the flag drooping above the central tower. The gardens were still gay with dahlias, and fuchsias, and tea-roses, and the fountains were all playing, while the peacocks drew their plumes over the terrace pavement. All that the place held, from its armoury to its hot-houses, from its State apartments where Tudor and Stuart sovereigns had slept, to its secret hiding chambers in the thickness of its walls, were all open to the sunlight and to Gladys Vernon.

She went through them enchanted and reverent, as though she turned the pages of some illuminated volume of Froissart or the Sire de Joinville. It was the first historic house which she had ever seen.

"It is a very noble home," said John Vernon. "Really you ought never to be wearied of it."

Guilderoy did not reply.

He was conscious that he did weary of it, and he regretted it.

"It is so bad a climate," he said after a pause. "Rain is depressing despite oneself; if the house were in Touraine or in Tuscany it would be perfect."

"Our fathers did not mind climate. I do not know why we are so sensitive to it," said Vernon. "I am not sure whether it shows emasculation or increased sympathy with nature."

"Both, perhaps," answered Guilderoy. "And then, probably, their England was in no way so bad as ours. The centre of it was not one vast furnace as it is now. You have only to go to Venice to see how rapidly smoke changes atmosphere."

"Well, you have no furnaces within a hundred miles. Be thankful," said John Vernon.

Meanwhile his young daughter was gazing about her, with her violet eyes wide open in eager interest and brilliant with pleasure. The old house fascinated her. Though she had seen nothing but the sea and the orchards by Christslea, she had a passionate love of all beautiful and ancient things. Of art she knew nothing by sight, and had only heard of it through books and her father's conversation, but she had the instinctive and unerring sense of its beauties and excellencies which is born in some temperaments.

Ladysrood was a treasure house of art; every generation which had passed away there had left something to increase the glories of its heirlooms; and the present lord himself had spent half a million of money in adding to its sculptures, and bronzes, and pictures. It was one of those palaces of the arts which have so long honoured England, hidden modestly away under her woods and in the folds of her low hills; and which are now in so many places being emptied and defiled, that the sound of the auctioneer's hammer may ring in unison with the death-knell of great races and of national honour.

The child looked suited to the house; she wore a plain grey frock with a pale blue sash, and a wide-brimmed grey felt hat, and she might have sat to Romney or Sir Joshua. She had put in the bosom of her frock some roses which Guilderoy had given her; her face, alternately serious and pensive, and gay and animated, was as lovely as any face in the marbles or the canvasses of his galleries. She was only a child,

but he thought that in the mere girl, fresh with the dews and the breezes of the country, it was easy to discern the great lady, the patrician beauty, of the future. She was now like a crayon sketch of Watts' or Leighton's, but a few years would make her a portrait in court dress by Carolus-Durant.

She was entirely a child; the solitude of her life and its rural pleasures and pursuits had kept her infinitely younger in many things than children reared in the world can ever be, whilst on the other hand the conversation and companionship of her father had made her mind graver and more thoughtful than her years. John Vernon had liked that simplicity and rusticity and had always forbore from causing any change in them. He abhorred the new theories of education for women, and he had preferred to see his child care for roses, for birds, for the sea and the moors, for all outdoor things and outdoor movements, than to see her dissect a rabbit or hear her discuss protogenesis. He had always thought of her as a mere baby; he had never been disturbed about her future or her right to see something of that world to which she by birth belonged. "It will always be time when she is grown up," he had always reflected; and that time had always seemed to him so far off that there could be no immediate need to think of it.

The habit of being always treated by him as a child had kept her perfectly childlike, while on the other hand the deference with which she was treated by the few rustics and fisher-people who made up her little world had developed in her the habits of command and of decision. The opposing influences sur-

rounding her had made her as little fitted for actual life as Tennyson's Princess or Coleridge's Christabel; but it had made her courageous and candid in an unusual degree; it had left her an infantine sweetness and innocence united to a great daring and seriousness; it had rendered her indeed so entirely unlike all other girls or women that Guilderoy was not merely yielding to a romantic exaggeration when he thought he saw in her an embodiment of Shakespeare's heroines, with the freshness and the frankness, the simplicity and the strength of a more unsophisticated and heroic time than her own.

"How charming is a young creature who has seen nothing, and is ready to understand everything instinctively," he said to her father when she had lingered behind them to look at a scene which had especially charmed her fancy.

Vernon smiled a little dubiously.

"You think so now because you happen to be in the mood to appreciate it, but in a little while you would find it monotonous, insipid, and uncultured. You would grow very tired of a mind which needed to have everything explained to it, and you would sigh for somebody who could catch your allusions flying."

"You speak of your daughter as though she were a dairymaid," Guilderoy said with indignation.

John Vernon laughed.

"Oh no; I appreciate her, perhaps more thoroughly than you do. I even grant that she is a charming child in many ways, and the kind of ignorance she has pleases me; if it had not done so I would have taken steps to change it. But if you ask me whether I con-

sider her a companion for a man of the world who lives in the world, I must say I do not. She would grow to his height in time no doubt, but he would have got fatigued of waiting for her long before she had reached there."

"You are very obstinate."

"Nay, I am not more obstinate than you, and I have more reason to be so, for I have more at stake."

"You will persist in regarding all I feel as a caprice."

"It is a caprice," said Vernon with some impatience as his young daughter came up to them.

She had been enchanted with a little picture, a David Cox, which chanced to represent the creek below Christslea with its apple orchards and its red sandstone cliffs, and this sudden finding and recognising of a piece of her own home landscape had seemed to her a miracle which she could in no way forget. Her enthusiasm amused her father, and touched and charmed her host.

"It would make the old painter happy in his grave if he could hear you," said Guilderoy. "David Cox loved England as you do. Most of his green lanes, and gorse-covered commons, and moss-grown watermills are swept away by the curse of modernity, but that little creek of Christslea is not changed, I think, by so much as a wind-blown tree, the less or the more; even the boat he has drawn on the sand looks like an old red boat which is used to fish with, there to-day. The man is dead, and the boat is there."

"It is wonderful," said Gladys in a tone of awe. "It is not six inches long this little picture, and yet

the whole creek is there, and one sees miles, miles, miles, out over the open sea, just as one does when one stands on the sands."

"That is Art the Magician," said Guilderoy. "We are so used to the sorcery that we forget the wonder of it. We want fresh eyes like yours to see it for us."

"You will surely let me give her that little water colour?" he asked of Vernon when she was again a few yards away from them.

"No, by no means," said the other almost rudely; the persistency of Guilderoy annoyed and irritated him; he was provoked that a man who had the whole world of women to choose from, must needs take a fancy to a country child who was as simple and untrained as a plant of sea lavender.

Luncheon was served in the small dining-room belonging to the Queen Anne suite of apartments, and when it was over John Vernon asked leave to return to the library, through which he had only passed hastily, and which was celebrated for its collection of State papers of the Tudor time, made by a learned earl in one of the previous centuries.

It was a noble room, though somewhat dark. It belonged to the oldest part of the house, and had deep embrasured windows, and walls and ceiling of carved oak. The catalogue of the books and manuscripts was a work of learning and care, as famous to bibliophiles as the collection itself. John Vernon was soon absorbed in its pages. It was a large folio lying open on a brass lectern. Guilderoy took advantage of his pre-occupation to lead the girl to the other end of the room, where there was a beautifully illuminated Horæ

of the fifteenth century under lock and key in a glass-case. While he turned the leaves over and explained to her the miniatures and allegorical borders he looked at her with a lover's eyes. She had taken off her hat, and the rebellious waves and curls of her hair shone in the pale light from one of the windows. Her eyes looked at him with the single-minded regard of a child of five years old. Her lips were parted as she listened, and the fairness of her throat looked like a lily beside the grey wool of her frock.

"After all," he thought as he gazed down on her, "there is nothing so bewitching as the morning of life; and old Herrick is right—

Gather your roses while ye may,  
Old Time is still a-flyng!

With scant regard for the priceless Horæ he had taken it from its double case and carried it into the embrasure of one of the windows, and he sat beside her, while the missal lay on her lap.

One of the miniatures was the marriage of St. Catherine with the child Jesus. Lilies and roses formed the border, and doves nested in twisted olive boughs above.

"That is very beautiful!" said Gladys; "and the doves are just like my doves at home."

"There is a dove which rests in the hearts of all of us some time or other," he answered. "Its name is love. Have you ever thought whether you would give it welcome?"

She looked at him in perplexity.

"No," she said, slowly. "At least, I am not sure. I love my father. Is that what you mean?"

"That is not at all what I mean," said Guilderoy with a smile as he glided on to one knee before her, and held the missal on her lap. He was in no haste to dispel this unconsciousness, it pleased him. It was so wholly simple and sincere. Any counterfeit of it would have been odious and contemptible, but the reality was lovely, grave and frank and sweet; as natural as the innocence of the dove.

"Tell me more stories," she said, turning a page of the Book of Hours.

His attitude did not trouble her; she thought he kneeled there to hold the heavy missal better.

Guilderoy did not reply; his eyes were dwelling on the youthful face above him, and he felt a passionate desire to cover it with kisses and to change the cool, faint colour of its lips and cheeks. He cast a rapid glance to where John Vernon at the other end of the room stood, with his back to them, bending over the lectern. The sun of the autumnal afternoon came through the leaded panes behind her, and shone about her head, giving it a shining nimbus and changing the grey of her fawn to silver. Her face was in shadow, and her dropped eyelids as she looked down on the book showed the deep dark line of the lashes, and gave her the grave and religious loveliness of some young saint.

"Would you love me a little?" he asked, leaning nearer, while his voice had the persuasive appeal in it which no woman to whom it had ever been addressed had ever resisted.



She was a little startled. Her eyes left the study of the Horæ and looked with bewilderment at him.

"I do not know," she stammered, while, without her knowing why, her cheeks grew hot; "I do not know. What do you mean? Why should I?"

"Because I love you," he answered, with an infinite caress in the words, which are so old and yet are ever so new. "Will you love me?" he asked her; "and live with me here?"

She looked at him with serious and doubtful eyes.

"Live here—at Ladysrood?" she asked.

"Well, yes; a few months out of the year—not more. I will be honest with you. But could you be happy with me, do you think?"

"I should like the house," she said with hesitation, but with unflattering honesty.

"Would you not like me also?" said Guilderoy. His words were light, but his eyes were eloquent, and startled the child's calm soul. Quite suddenly, and for the first time in her life, a blush like the rose of dawn spread over her face and throat. She could not have told why, nor said what she felt.

"I do not know," she stammered, and her eyelids fell.

"I will teach you to know," murmured Guilderoy, and he drew her gently towards him, and kissed her.

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## CHAPTER X.

FIVE minutes later John Vernon closed the catalogue, and turned and saw them.

"Lord Guilderoy, I had your word," he said with great anger. "Could I suppose that you would betray me in such a manner as this? It is wholly unworthy of you—and in your own house also! For shame!"

Guilderoy's face flushed a little.

"You are very severe. Can you make no excuse for temptation? I quite admit that I have broken my word in the spirit, although not in the letter—since you were present. Is it worth while to make a quarrel of what cannot be unsaid now? Ask your daughter."

The child stood looking from one to the other with some timidity. She did not wholly understand even now what it was which made her the subject of dissension. She was bewildered; afraid, and yet happy. The dark library seemed to her full of golden light.

"Gladys, is it possible that you wish to leave me—and for a stranger!" said her father, with pain and reproach in his voice and his heart.

She hung her head, and her face burned with changing blushes.

"It is not very far away," she murmured almost inaudibly.

John Vernon understood that she was lost to him, and that to strive against fate any longer was useless.

## CHAPTER XI.

"I SWEAR that I will make your daughter happy, if human means can command happiness," said Guilderoy a few days later when they were alone.

"For six months perhaps," said Vernon with impatience.

"Why do you doubt me so?" said Guilderoy, offended and pained.

"I do not doubt you in especial. You are possibly gentler and kinder than most men. But you are mortal, and you cannot prevent the divergence of character, the satiety of habit, the destruction of illusions, the growth of new passions—all that is inevitable in human nature, and in utter defiance of which marriage, the supreme idiotcy of social laws, has been made eternal!"

"You are not encouraging."

"I desire so little to encourage," said John Vernon with some violence, "that if you will take back this evening the promise you have given my child this afternoon, far from blaming or reproaching you, I shall thank you. She does not care for you. You flatter and dazzle her, and she is in love with your house, but she would forget you in a week if you withdrew your word. Withdraw it; both she and you will be spared much sorrow."

"Your prophecies are painful to me," said Guilderoy; "but I will risk their realisation. I think she

loves me already as far as a child of her years can understand love. She would be less innocent than she is if she loved me more. I have had enough of passion—too much of it. I desire repose.”

“And in six month’s time you will say, ‘I am tired of repose; give me passion.’”

“And do you think so lovely a creature incapable of inspiring it?”

“I think she will be incapable of inspiring it in you because she will be your wife,” replied John Vernon.

His heart was heavy and his forebodings were founded on his knowledge of mankind. He was well aware that his dislike to such a marriage for his child was ingratitude to fate, and would have seemed to most men a kind of madness. He was well aware that the future of his young daughter had been often a subject of disquietude and anxiety to him, and that, in a worldly sense, no destiny more brilliant than this now offered could be desired for her.

But he despised worldly advantages. He had learned to know that happiness comes from within, not without. He considered that the contentment which she had learned with himself to feel amongst simple things and homely joys was worth more than the pomps and vanities of a great position. He did justice to the generosity and gentleness of Guilderoy’s temperament, but he did not believe in its stability or in its loyalty; nay, he believed in no man’s, because he knew that the affections, like the senses, are beyond our own control. He saw a thousand reasons why this union should become a source of ultimate regret and unhappiness to both of them. He saw few probabilities

that it would end otherwise than in estrangement and disappointment to both of them.

"The child is wholly unfit for your position," he said angrily. "She knows the names and qualities of all the apples in England, and she knows something of the history of England from first sources; but she knows next to nothing more, and no one wants to hear of pippins and russets or of Hengist and Horsa in your world. Go away, my dear lord, and you will have forgotten that she exists in ten days' time.

"She has not an idea of what you mean," he added bitterly. "Marriage is only a word to her. She thinks of living in Ladysrood as a child of five years old would think of it—as a delightful and roomy play-place. All that ignorance will excite you and interest you entirely for a few weeks—I know that—but at the end of those weeks you will ask yourself angrily why you took a country child to make you ridiculous. When you have dissipated the ignorance, what remains behind will not interest you in the least. You will begin to expect a woman's wisdom and patience in her, and you will not find them—children are never patient or wise. You think me a prophet of ill. I am one, certainly. It is utterly impossible that a girl like her and a man like you can live together without bitter disappointment and endless friction."

"She is too young! She is too young!" he repeated to himself again and again that night on his return from Ladysrood. He had said nothing to the child alone—what was the use of questioning her? She did not know her own heart: how could she answer for it?

"You are not glad?" she asked him wistfully when

she came to bid him good-night. He looked away from her and drew her head down on his breast and kissed her curls.

"I hope you may be as happy, my darling, with him as you have been with me. I do not think you can be more so," he said tenderly, and said nothing more. What use was it to alarm her young soul with suggestions of perils and sorrows which she would be wholly unable to understand? Life looked to her like the gilded and illuminated pages of the Ladysrood missal. Why tell her that these pages would be stained and blotted by tears?

In the little parlour of Christslea Guilderoy and John Vernon sat long in conversation that evening.

Neither convinced the other.

The incipient friendship which had begun to grow up between them had been disturbed and diminished by the precipitancy of the one and the opposition of the other. Vernon considered himself dealt with in bad faith, and Guilderoy grew impatient at the discontent with which his proposals were received.

"Does he think it would be a happier fate to have all her youth pass away in this little combe by the sea with no companions but the gulls and the rabbits?" he thought, with a not unnatural sense that the immense gifts brought in his own hands were too little appreciated, whilst yet he respected all the more a man who accounted material and social advantages as of so little avail.

It was in vain that he offered the most princely presents to her and promised to render her, as far as fortune went, wholly independent of himself.

John Vernon heard all this with little patience.

"I do not doubt your generosity or your justice," he said more than once. "I have told you before, I am convinced that you are not a man to injure or to defraud a woman. But against what I fear you can give no possible guarantees. You wish for Gladys at this moment as you have wished for a hundred women before her and will wish for a hundred women after her. You will tell me that you feel differently to her to what you have done to others, and no doubt you believe it; but you are mistaken. You feel precisely the same, and your caprice will pass as all your other caprices have done."

"Will you not allow me even to know my own emotions?" said Guilderoy with anger. "And will you tell me what greater proof any man can give of the honesty of his emotions than to desire to make anyone his wife whom he loves?"

"That is quite true," replied her father, "and I do not question your present sincerity—I cannot do so in face of the evidences you are willing to give of it. But I do not think that your emotions are of the kind you fancy them, and I am wholly certain that my poor child will not have the knowledge, the character, or the education in her which could alone enable a woman to keep her hold on the affections of such a man as you. Remember what the Master of Love said—

*Ut levis, absumentis paulatim viribus, ignis  
Ipse latet, summo candet in igne cinis;  
Sed tamen extinctas, admoto sulphure, flammæ  
Invenit, et lumen, quod fuit ante, reddit.*

My child will not know how to throw the sulphur on

the fading flames, and your fire will die out on her altar."

"I am tired of the sirens who throw the sulphur," replied Guilderoy. "'Et puer est, et nudus Amor.' I want the innocence of extreme youth and the divine nudity of a soul which has nothing to conceal. Give them to me and I will respect them."

John Vernon sighed impatiently and abandoned the argument.

He did not doubt the entire good faith of his companion, but he was none the less certain of the truth of his own predictions. Guilderoy wished for these things as a child wishes for playthings, but they would have no more power to secure his constancy than the toy to charm the child for ever. But with love, as with anger, he knew that it was waste of breath to argue.

Guilderoy had received another letter that day from Italy which had also irritated him excessively; a letter full of those useless reproaches, those unwise rebukes, those injudicious and violent demands which are the whips wherewith women think to scourge to activity a dead or dying passion. They are usually as futile as a whip of nettles used on a marble statue. They were not absolutely ineffective here, for they succeeded in stinging his soul into anger and rebellion; but they utterly failed to accomplish the purpose for which they were intended. On the contrary, they confirmed him in the wish which, half in jest half in earnest, had moved him to give his life into the hand of Gladys Vernon.

He was a man of sudden impulses, romantic fancies, and very hasty action which was united with an in-



dolent and vaguely philosophic temper. The letter was imperious, reproachful, and passionate. It produced on him the opposite effect that it was intended to produce on him. It made him angry, irritated, and desirous to assert an independence which every word in it refused to him. Guilderoy, like many men who are tender of heart and yet unconsciously selfish, was easily led but was difficult to drive. If he felt coerced he rebelled instantly. Tact and persuasion might lead him long, but the instant he felt that there was any effort to coerce him by force he grew restive, and men much less amiable and gentle were much easier to direct and to command than he. His correspondent made the supreme error of exacting as a right what had no charm unless it were voluntary, and claiming as a due what was nothing if it were not a gift. The wood-dove was right in his choice, he thought, but only right as long as his companion pleases him and leaves him free. If she fasten a fetter on his foot the very fussing and fretting of the sparrows were better than the columbarium in the clouds.

He shrank from the intent to rule and hold him which was so visible in the letter he had just received; he felt a vehement desire to vindicate his liberty against the claims which she so obviously showed her intention to lay upon it forever, or at least for such a "forever" as her pride and her passion might desire and demand from the future. He was a Lancelot whom Guinevere might have bound forever to her girdle if she had never let him feel that there was a chain under the silken leash. But as every Guinevere had been so rash and so blind as to let him feel it and be galled

by it, each had in turn had his allegiance but a brief while. The Duchess Soria had had it longer than any other.

She had many advantages. She lived farther away from him than most; she had greater beauty than most; and she had that eminence of social position which raises a woman so high that no lover can doubt her sincerity in her selection of him, or her facilities for replacing him by others if she chose. These advantages had made her reign over his passions and command his allegiance longer than any other woman had done. It had been always understood that if Hugo Soria died, Guilderoy would ratify his devotion by marriage; but he himself had never cared to contemplate that probability; for the rest, Soria was almost as young as he was himself, and there was no apparent likelihood of his freeing his wife of his presence on earth, unless some unforeseen accident or some duel ending fatally were to prematurely cut short the measure of his days. Had he died, the world and Beatrice Soria herself would have expected her lover to replace him; the certainty with which she would have expected this allowed a too dominant and insistent tone of appropriation to show now through the lines of her letter, and raised in the feelings of its reader that instinct of rebellion which lies in the breast of all men. His intimacy with her had lasted years enough for many faults in her character to have become revealed to him. He had had time to outlive the belief in those perfections which every man who is much in love attributes to his mistress; he knew her to be imperious, exacting, and disdainful when offended. They were defects which

in daily life poison peace more cruelly than any others.

Beatrice Soria in Paris or Naples, visited at intervals, and seen only in her superb bloom of beauty, had a great and irresistible sorcery for him, but Beatrice Soria as the eternal companion of his fate would have alienated and have irritated him unbearably.

Or, at the least, he thought so now, as his conscience smarted and his impatience rebelled under the lash of her impassioned reproaches and recall.

He read her last letter many times when he sat in the solitude of the library on the evening of that day. It did not touch his heart; it disturbed his temper. It made him feel blameable and selfish, but it did not make him feel regretful or repentant. He laid the paper down before him under the light, and then looked up from it to the window far off where Gladys had sat a week or two before and he had held the great missal upon her knee.

The embrasure of the window was shrouded in the dark velvet curtains which the servants had drawn at nightfall, but he seemed to see her tall, slender, stooping form seated there, her golden-haired head, her face with its first sudden blush. He was not in love with her; no, it did not seem to him that even yet his new feeling merited that name, but he was haunted by the thought of her, distressed by the desire of her. She was unlike anything of her sex that he had ever known, and she seemed already a part of Ladysrood, like its marble figures of Florence and its old sweet roses of France.

He hesitated no more, but drew pen and paper to

him and began to answer the letter which lay under his hand. It was not an easy task. To say to a woman who loves him that he not only loves her no longer, but has transferred his allegiance elsewhere, is painful to any man who has a conscience and a memory.

He had those vague sentiments of inclination to the refreshment of repose, of pure affections, and of family ties which visit at times all men who have imagination and emotions, and which are perhaps the most utterly delusive and misleading of all their fancies.

Again and again has the mirage of innocent and lawful joys passed alluringly before the eyes of a tired man of the world, and has been followed by him only to bring him to the desert sands of monotony, of weariness, and of thralldom.

He was perfectly sincere when he assured John Vernon of his indifference to the passions and the pleasures of which his life had hitherto been so full, and of his wishes for a simpler, purer, and more legitimate attachment than those which he had known. But though he had not any intention of deceiving others; he did so because he deceived himself, and took what was a mere passing phase of imagination for a lasting alteration in his temperament.

Was it true that of this child he really knew no more than of a shut book, of which the exterior pleased him? Was it possible that with the passing of the years he would grow farther and farther from her rather than she nearer and nearer to him? His reason and his observation of the lives of others told him that it was very possible.

Fancy and admiration had hurried him into an action

in which opposition had confirmed his persistency. But now that in cold blood he looked at his future, he could not feel sure that he would never repent an act which gave power over it into the hands of a child whose affections even were scarcely his, and of the tenacity of whose character he had had evidence.

He desired to possess her beauty, and he was fascinated by the courage and the simplicity which he saw in her; but the prophecies of John Vernon haunted and disquieted him, and his knowledge of his own temperament told him that they were not unlikely to be true hereafter.

How much of mere caprice, of sheer waywardness, of momentary impatience of existing ties, and of amusement at irritating the opposition of his sister had there not been mingled with the more poetic and personal feelings which had first sent him to Christ'slea?

"After all, it is the folly of life which lends charm to it," he thought, but he felt that if John Vernon had been able to know his thoughts he would have told him that the love which does not blindly believe itself to be the highest wisdom of life has the seeds of death in it at its birth.

Indeed, he was well aware of it himself.

The warning words produced a vague effect upon him.

He felt vaguely that the future might justify them, and although he had been so self-willed in following out his caprice, he almost regretted now that fate had granted him his wishes.

Had he mistaken a momentary desire for a strength of feeling such as was needed to outlast the stress of time?

In vain he told himself that Beatrice Soria had no claim of any sort upon him; he knew that the mere absence of claim constituted her strongest title to his fidelity; he knew moreover that his relations with her had touched her heart and her passions profoundly whatever they had done to his own.

He was tired of those relations; they had a side to them which wearied and irritated him; he had resolved in his own mind to go back to her no more, because recrimination and reproach had of late formed the staple of her welcome. Yet the announcement of his marriage was very difficult to him to make, and now and again he pushed the paper from him and leaned his head upon his hands and saw the eyes of his forsaken love burning on him through the dark. She had not been alone in his affections, but she had been chief in them; and he knew that he had reigned supreme in hers. The letter of farewell which he was compelled to compose seemed a cowardice. It was the kind of letter which a gentleman cannot write without feeling that he loses something in his own self-esteem by writing it; indeed, the more truly he is a gentleman the more acutely he will feel this.

But despite his reluctance and the difficulty of the task, it was written at last, and when it had gone away from him irrevocably in the post-bag with which a lad rode fifteen miles over the moors every morning, he had a sense of relief: of such relief as comes from a decision taken without power to undo or to modify it.

What would she answer?

He counted the days which must elapse before a reply could reach him, and opened the letter-bag with

anxiety when those days had passed. To his astonishment he received no answer at all; days became weeks, weeks months, and silence alone followed on his declaration of self-chosen and deliberate inconstancy. Such silence made him uneasy and apprehensive. He knew that it was not the silence of indifference; and, if not that, then what must it portend?

Once or twice he was tempted to break it by writing again himself. But this he felt it was impossible to do; no man can insist on, or emphasise by unasked repetition, his own avowal of mutability and voluntary faithlessness. Silence was, at least, acquiescence and permission.

He had sought these and he could not quarrel with receiving them. Meanwhile he felt free to do what he was bent on doing, and used all his power of persuasion to induce Vernon to shorten his probation.

Vernon was very reluctant to do so.

"She does not love you. She does not know what love is. You mistake if you fancy she does," he said to Guilderoy, who smiled.

"I will teach her," he answered.

"Yes," said John Vernon with pain and impatience, "and when she has learned the lesson it will have grown dull to you, and the teacher will go elsewhere. What is the cause of half the misery of women? That their love is so much more tenacious than the man's; it grows stronger as his grows weaker. He desires one thing which is quickly satisfied; she desires innumerable things which can never be satisfied, and among them as the most mythical and the most impossible she desires—poor soul!—the man's constancy."

Where other men would only have seen the gain and honour of such a marriage he saw the grey cloud of possible, of most probable, unhappiness. As he walked in calm dark evenings by the little bay beneath his house the murmur of the waves sounded mournfully on his ear; and as he looked up at the attic window of his daughter's room shrouded in the ivy of the eaves, it was no mere selfish sense of his own coming loneliness which made him wish to heaven that Guilderoy had never come across her path.

Happiness is not a thing to be commanded, he thought with sadness and anxiety, to be obtained by any ingenuity, or retained by any obedience to precept or to duty. It is the most spontaneous thing on earth; born only of the sympathies of two natures which mutually supply each other's needs; it is like the sunshine and the shower, and can no more be brought into human life by any endeavour than they can be brought on earth by the efforts of science. Happiness is the dew of the heart, making all green things spring where once the soil was barren; but it is not in human nature to create it at will, and it is a gift of destiny like genius or beauty.

True, ingrates mar the gift, as in the fairy story the talisman is lost by careless keeping; but it comes to none at prayer, at exercise of will: it is a treasure of the gods, and alas! "*Deus ridere credo, quum felix vocat.*"

But Vernon's wishes and his regrets could not stay the flight of time, nor change a caprice which opposition or warning only served to inflame; and before he was wholly sensible that the winter was gone, violets



and hepatica were abloom in his orchard grass, and the little fishing fleet was setting out for its springtide harvest of the sea, and March was ended, and Guilderoy claimed from him a promise which he had no choice but to fulfil.

They were married in the private chapel of Ladysrood with no one present, by her father's wish, except himself and the old servants of the house, and she wore the white cambric frock which she had for her best for summer Sundays at Christslea, and about the throat of it were strings of pearls which Guilderoy had given her and which were worthy a queen's regalia.

The heart of John Vernon was heavy as he left them to themselves, and took his way back to his solitary house through the budding woods, over the wide moors lying in the pale afternoon sunlight, while the sound of the more distant sea came like human sighs through the rural silence to his ears. There was the scent of violets on the wind and the golden gleam of gorse in the landscape; ever and anon he came in sight of the sea, grey and still, red sails and white crossing it noiselessly. The day was clear and soft and mild, the scene was fair, and yet the sense of a great sadness weighed upon him as he left his child the mistress of all these spreading woods and stately towers and pleasant gardens which lay behind him under the pale grey skies.

The world, he knew, would tell him with all its myriad voices that he had, in his solitude and poverty, had a stroke of the most marvellous good fortune, a social triumph such as most would prize and covet beyond all things. But John Vernon did not see as the world sees, and he would with much surer confidence

and greater joy have known that his daughter had gone to a lowlier fate, where the world would have never given her that crown of envy which is so often a crown of thorns. Never again would the little simple things of life make her happiness; never again would she run through the wet grass a mere careless child, happy because a lamb was born, or a sea mouse was washed up by the tide, or the first daffodils were blowing under the trees of the orchard.

The world despised such simple things, but then was the world right? Would that collar of pearls which was fit for a queen give her in truth half the pleasure that her daisy chains had given her in the meadows under the apple bough?

"Nay, I grow old and shall feel lonely, and so see all things in shadow. Life can stand still with none of us, with her no more than with others," he told himself as he walked over the moors, and he looked at the yellow gorse shining before him in the light of the afternoon, and tried to hope that "straight was a path of gold" for her.

## CHAPTER XII.

"My dear Hilda," wrote Guilderoy to his sister, "I am about to marry the daughter of Mr. Vernon of Llanarth, as I told you in September that I should do. You have been always exceedingly desirous that I should marry, only it was on condition that you should be empowered to choose the companion of my destinies. As I am the more interested of the two in such a

choice, I have ventured to make the selection without applying to you. I should be sorry if you should persist in quarrelling with me about it, because there is really no valid ground whatever for a quarrel. Gladys Vernon is not a kitchen-maid, a *femme tarée*, or an American adventuress in search of a title, the only three persons to whom you would, I think, be justified in objecting *vi et armis*. She is quite a child, and I venture to hope that you will be kind to her. When will you return to Ladysrood and let her see you?"

The letter concluded with some allusions to other matters of less personal interest, and was signed with affectionate expressions.

It reached Lady Sunbury when she was staying with a large party with her uncle at Balfrons. The shock of the intelligence was increased by her knowledge of her own error in leaving her brother's house: who could tell what influence she might not have had if she had remained with him? The fact that she had not the very slightest kind of influence on Guilderoy at any time did not occur to her remembrance. She was a clever woman, but like many clever people she had no just estimate of her power over others; because she felt the ability to guide them she imagined that she had the means to do so, an error common enough in human nature.

"Evelyn is going to marry a country girl because she beat some village boys off a fox!" she cried with intense bitterness to her cousin Aubrey, who chanced to be in the library at Balfrons at that moment. "Good heavens! a man who has declined half the best alliances in Europe goes and throws himself away in some mo-

ment of mad caprice on a rustic. Somebody with brown hands, and lean elbows, who will make me look ridiculous when I have to present her! Somebody whom he will get divorced from with some horrible *esclandre* and uproar that will be the talk of London a whole season!"

"A country girl?" said Lord Aubrey, raising his eyebrows; "*Je lui donne une quinzaine!*"

"Is it not just like him?" cried Lady Sunbury, with a quiver of unutterable scorn in her voice. "Is it not exactly the kind of thing we might be sure he would do? After all these years of hypercriticism, of superciliousness, of disdain, all these years of romantic caprices and impossible passions, after rejecting all the most charming women in Europe, to go and throw his life away on a rustic hoyden, a vixen whom he saw fighting with a mob of village boys!"

Aubrey laughed; he was accustomed to his cousin's manner of arranging circumstances according to her own views of them.

"I don't think it can be quite as bad as that," he said, turning over the letter, which she had thrown to him. "One can trust Evelyn's taste in women and pictures. But if you knew there was any danger of this affair, why did you not stay on at Ladysrood?"

"Would to heaven I had!" said Lady Sunbury, with infinite bitterness. "I should have seen her at any rate!"

"I wouldn't make a quarrel if I were you," said Aubrey. "You see, he writes very well; he is evidently anxious you should countenance the affair, and that is a good deal for him to admit."

"Countenance it! Never!"

"Then you will make a great blunder," said her cousin very sensibly. "There is nothing for anyone seriously to object to, we may be sure; he is not a man to marry anybody beneath him, and it is merely a matter of good feeling with him to ask your approbation; what you do cannot really matter two straws to him. Come, write something pleasant. Why quarrel? After all, it does not really concern you."

"Concern me?" repeated Lady Sunbury, in a voice stifled by rage. "Not concern me? What should concern me? What should concern me if not the honour of my family, the reputation of my brother, the purity of my father's name, the respect of my own native county?"

"Those valuable things are all safe enough," said Aubrey, carelessly. "Evelyn is a fool in some ways, but he will not buy a *pêche à quinze sous* with his family pride: in that kind of matter he is the proudest man living. Of course it does not please you; it is natural it should not please you; but if I were you I would try to look as if it did. Pleasantness is always the best policy before anything which we cannot alter."

"What is the matter?" asked the Earl of Sunbury, coming in with a bundle of letters for his wife to answer.

"Guilderoy is going to marry a country girl, and Hilda takes it as an insult to herself," replied her cousin.

Sunbury gave a long whistle.

"A country girl, and you will have to present her?" he said, with zest in anything which annoyed his wife,

"Others may present her. I shall not," said Lady Sunbury.

"Ah! you mean to make a row of it? You always make a row. Lots of people will present her. Perhaps she has decent people of her own. Is she born, as the French say?"

"You had better write and congratulate him," said his wife. "He cares so much for your opinion!"

"I shall certainly congratulate him. I always like him, though he monopolises all the amiability of his family," replied Sunbury, who had often found the generosity of his brother-in-law convenient and long-suffering.

"Oh, yes; write and felicitate him, both of you," said Aubrey, rising and going away before what he foresaw would be a connubial quarrel. "He has done a great folly, and of course he will regret it immeasurably, and all that, but we cannot alter it; and after all it is his own affair. And you would not like Madame Soria better, and it would be Madame Soria some day if it were not someone else."

"A wholesome English girl is certainly better than *that*, if she be a dairymaid," said Lady Sunbury; and towards evening she wrote a letter which was almost kind in tone, although the kindness was marred and jarred by many prophecies of ill.

"It is strange how certain both she and John Vernon are that we shall be miserable!" thought Guilderoy when he received it.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

GUILDEROY had a palace of his own in Venice, placed on one of the curves of the Grand Canal, one of the oriental palaces with Byzantine windows and carved and painted walls, and a water-story of white marble, with great pointed doors and wide flights of water steps, and at its side one of the lovely luxuriant green gardens of Venice with acacia and cereus drooping over its low red wall. It was to this palace of his every April that his thoughts turned longingly, and it was thither that he took Gladys in the early spring days of the year. It seemed to him the most fitting place that love and youth could find. It was a spring-time even more than usually radiant, fragrant, and mild, and the Venetian air was full of the scent of the primroses blooming on the Brenta banks, and of the budding narcissus in the meadow grass of the many islands.

It was a change such as the wand of any Prospero might have caused, which suddenly carried her from the sea mists and bare orchards and channel winds of the Christseale shore, to the shining waters, the liquid sunshine, the gorgeous marbles, and the cloudless moonlight evenings of the Adriatic city.

The charm of Venice is one of those emotions which must be felt not told, which are too delicate,

too intricate and too romantic to be ever coldly dissected and described.

Venice escapes alike the poet and the painter. They may pourtray her past and paint her waterways, but they cannot embody her fugitive and unutterable fascination any more than they can give on canvas that faint red glow, those silvery dove-hued waters, that dreamy and exquisite silence, those ethereal visions of evening on sea and land.

The balmy air, the radiant light, the slow soft motion of the pliant gondola, the amorous music floating down the moonlit water, the shadowy splendour of the stately frescoed chambers, were all in the sharpest and strongest contrast with the rude coast, the grey boisterous water, the simple ways, and the narrow rooms, the misty mornings and the chilly eves, the sober colours and the sombre moorlands of her English home. It was a sensation which charmed yet hurt her; she felt much as one of her own pigeons from Christslea, brought from the shady roost under the thatch to dwell amongst the pigeons of St. Mark would have felt amongst the marble lodges, the gilded pinnacles, the bewildering sunshine, and the glittering mosaics.

She wished with all her soul that he had let her spend these springtide weeks in the budding gardens and the secluded rooms of Ladysrood. There she would have felt less frightened, more familiar; here the intense light seemed like a million curious creatures all staring at her, and when the bold eyes of the gondoliers looked at her with a smile in them she felt herself colour scarlet as at some violating touch.

Guilderoy, who had felt from his earliest years the



magic of the Adriatic, grew impatient with his companion that she seemed so little sensible of it and sighed for the elm-tree boles and primrose roots of wet dim English fields.

It was not insensibility, but for once his discernment was not profound enough to let him see this. The girl was bewildered and inarticulate, rather from excess of emotion than of lack of it, and longed for the familiar landscapes of her short past from the same instinct as makes a stray animal seek its homing pastures.

The scenes around her were too beautiful and intoxicating for her to know how to bear them, even as were the ardours of those new passions which had whirled her from childhood into womanhood at a bound.

Guilderoy was as far from divining what she felt as were the men whose oars took them through the shining waters. She remained shyer than he wished; he was half impatient of it as insensibility, but all the mute vague passions, the unspoken emotions, the timidity at her own sensations, and the shrinking from all observation which were in her, he knew and heeded very little.

She never looked back in after times to those weeks in Venice without a sense of them as of some dream too beautiful and marvellous ever to be repeated, and yet with a vague awe and terror touching its beauty with a darkness that enhanced its light. She never in after days saw the gold sunbeams ripple on the silvery surface of the lagoons, or the marbles of St. Mark shine white beneath the moon, without the remembrance of the half-unconscious rapture, and the bewildered embar-

rassment and apprehension which she had felt in that April time of love.

"You have never yet told me that you love me!" he said to her once with some amusement and some annoyance blended in his thought.

She looked up a moment, then her eyelids fell.

"I can feel but I cannot speak," she might have answered had she not been too shy, but shyness held her silent.

"I wonder what she does feel," he thought, rather with curiosity than with emotion. "It is almost like making love to a statue or a corpse, she is so irresponsible. She is not cold, but she is so still one cannot tell whether it is her senses which are still asleep or her affections. She is rather alarmed by than moved to any pleasure, and yet now and then, when I glance at her unawares, there is a look in her eyes that is like love. I suppose the truth is that John Vernon was right—she is too young."

But however young she might be she was very lovely, and her absolute passionlessness and stillness at the present time had a seduction for him which was in a manner morbid and yet sweet, tantalising and yet alluring, enhancing his passions, though failing to arouse in him higher and stronger emotions. He did not understand the intense shyness which enveloped her as a frost encloses and sheets over a lake; the depths of the water, with all their stirring and palpitating life are there beneath, but so covered that none can see them. He did not understand the mingled terror and ecstasy which his own love was to her, and the bewilderment her own feelings and agitation were to her. A man

less impassioned and more patient might have alarmed her less, and so succeeded in calling out the timid intensity of her soul into actual expression; but he had not the self-denial or the patience requisite, and he had enveloped her in the fires of passion before he had ever sought to penetrate the arcana of her waking soul. She loved him with all the force of her nature, but she could not have said so to save her life; and with this love which had so suddenly surged up in her and overwhelmed her there was a sense of fear mingled; the only fear which had ever touched her dauntless and courageous temper. The fear was sweet to her, but still it was fear; not fear so much of him as of herself, and of all the strange emotions which had risen in her.

If she could have spoken what she felt, she would have poured out poems as sweet and as ardent as any that ever poet penned. But timidity and ignorance of what name to give her own emotions held her mute, and he remained in doubt as to whether she were physically cold or mentally unintelligent. Before he had been in Venice a month he remembered with regret the warning which her father had given him: "You will soon wish for those who can throw the sulphur on the fading flames."

His affection for her had increased since they had been together, for he had recognised since then more fully the delicacy, the honour, and the high breeding of her character, but his caprice was already losing something of its attraction, and his passions were demanding more response to them.

"I strive to make her happy," he wrote to John

Vernon, "but I am not as sure as I wish to be that I succeed."

John Vernon wrote back to him, "You do not succeed because you have called on a child's soul for a woman's passions; you have pulled open the rose-bud to make a full-blown rose. It is impossible that your rose should be perfect."

He felt some impatience of her entire passiveness. He wished either for refusal and opposition or for responsive passion; but she yielded to him like a slave, and yet responded no more in feeling than if she were a form of ivory or wax. It was seductive from its strangeness; and yet it was, he foresaw, what in a few months would fatigue him, and be insufficient for him.

"It is a pity that we need go home so soon," he said once with regret.

She turned to him with a smile, "Oh, no! Ladysrood is even dearer than this."

"We cannot go to Ladysrood," said Guilderoy with a little impatience, "you must be seen in London. I hate London. It is the antithesis of everything I like; but, if you were not presented, they would say I had married a gypsy or a gardener's daughter."

"Would that matter very much?" said Gladys, with her delicate eyebrows drawn a little together.

"No, I do not know that it would; but Englishmen are always conventional, even when they don't know it; all men are, indeed, who belong to a certain world. I do not care what people say—no man cares less; and yet I feel that I should be irritated if they talked nonsense about me."

Gladys was silent. Her feelings were all primitive

and direct. She was far from understanding complexity of sentiment or the existence of two morbid yet contradictory feelings at the same moment.

"I love Ladysrood," she said, with a great longing in her voice, "and I love the country. All the time we have been here I have been thinking of that line of Browning's,

"Oh, to be in England, now that April's there!"

Guilderoy looked at her in surprise.

"I did not know you had read Browning. He is not a child's poet. And, my dear, do not set your heart on living at Ladysrood. I told you honestly, you will remember, that I could not promise to be often there."

"Yes, I remember." A shadow passed over her face—not of resentment but of disappointment, which troubled him more.

"You will enjoy the world when you know it," he said consolingly. "All women do. There are things besides daisies and buttercups that will please you. The country is infinitely soothing when one is ill or unhappy, or has failed to attain anything one wanted; but it is tedious, and its outlook is narrow. Imperceptibly one adopts the small views which make up its world, and the forces of one's mind get narrowed to suit them. And the country in England is so much more intolerable than anywhere else, because the weather is so bad: to endure it long one must have the rusticity of Wordsworth's mind, and boots and stockings as homely."

Gladys did not reply. She looked down into the water through which she was drawing her left hand, taking pleasure in the brushing of the ribbon weed against her fingers.

"Do you really dream of living at Ladysrood all the year round?" he asked her, impatiently.

"I should like it," she said gently. "But then, of course, I do not know any other life than that country life."

"Ask me anything else," said Guilderoy, "but not that, for heaven's sake."

"I will never ask you anything. My father told me not."

"But I wish you to ask me for anything that comes into your fancy," he said, vaguely irritated. "My dear child, if you and I cannot say frankly to each other any whim or folly that comes into our heads, who on earth should do so? There is no happiness possible, Gladys, where there is any reserve."

The girl was silent, her fingers playing with the water weeds on the limpid shallows of the lagoon.

"Do you understand?" he continued, still impatiently; though tenderly, "I wish you to confide in me all your desires, and, as far as it is mortally possible, I will do my utmost to gratify them."

"You are very good to me," said Gladys with a little hesitation.

"That is not the language of love," said Guilderoy with annoyance.

The girl coloured; her lips parted to speak, but words failed her. She longed to tell him that she loved him with all her soul so far as youth can love, but she

was shy to utter anything she felt. She seemed to him less intelligent, and far less tender, than she really was.

Guilderoy had himself the infinite expectations and anticipations which belong to those whose feelings are rather impassioned than profound, and whose imagination is more vivid than their constancy is durable. But he had not the patience which is often necessary for the full comprehension of character, especially of character which is half developed and still growing.

Every day the memory of John Vernon's philosophic warnings recurred more often to him, and he was more persuaded of their truth. And yet he was still greatly enamoured of her. Her physical beauty was too great to let him be otherwise, and the sense of the absolute freshness and innocence of all her nature were in a sense very lovely to him after the many women, so unlike her, whom he had known.

And yet there was something wanting. She understood so little, she responded so little, she was still so much more frightened than she was happy at the dominance of love. He felt that it had been unwise to take her away from the simple, childish, unemotional life which had been so far more suited to her years. Her father had been thoroughly right. Guilderoy, before a week was out, acknowledged it to his own soul. A man more patient and less voluptuous by temperament and habit than he was might have seen by intuition into all the treasures of her unuttered feelings, but he only thought her impatiently a child whose slumbering senses and alarmed bashfulness irritated and fatigued him. The startled nymph should, to please

his taste, have grown suddenly at his touch into a goddess, and she did not do so.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

THERE are few prettier scenes than the great Piazza of San Marco on a summer's night. The gaiety of the sauntering crowds, the sparkling of the many lights, the animation of the cafés and the colonnades, the sound of the military music, and the ring of the spoons on the platters of ice or the saucers of chocolate, are all of them like Paris in June; but then there is something else too, something that is not to be found in Paris or anywhere else than in Venice; there are the mighty walls and columns of marble towering up into the blue darkness of the sky; there is the shaft of the bell-tower, seeming to stretch and touch the stars; and there is the sense and the sound of the sea waves close at hand; while above—high above in the shadows—the twin lights which have burned there every night for five hundred years for the soul of a murdered man shine as steadily as the twin stars of the Pointers.

So much has been rhymed and written of Venice that nothing hardly is left to say, and yet with it all so little has been said because so little can its singular charm and grace be ever spoken in words; the spell of the terrors of the past which lie so close to the mirth of the present, the sense of the wide sea waste and the wild sea winds which lie so close to the jewelled altars and the porphyry palaces, and the sweet



faces of the women of Titian, and the yellow sails of the boatmen of Mazzorbo, pushing their fruit and their fish up the market stairs by Rialto.

This is the subtle and marvellous charm of Venice which has not been caught in the words of Consuelo, nor in the volumes of Ruskin, nor in the verse of Musset, nor in the tragedy of Shakespeare, nor in any printed page of human genius save Shelley's.

One evening Guilderoy and Gladys sat before Florian's, with the soft sea-born day fading in faint roseate skies and the people coming up the water stairs and in from the calle, wondering if there would be any music there that night, for the season was as yet early and the air cold after sunset.

"Do you mean that you would prefer Ladysrood to this?" he asked her incredulously, while the pigeons going to roost circled above the white pinnacles of Sansovino's shrine.

"I could care very dearly for Ladysrood," she answered with hesitation.

"And I am glad that you should since it belongs to us; and I care for it myself. But to prefer it to this! Think what chilly, misty mornings, what stormy, dusky sunsets it is surely having now. England might be tolerable in the south were it not for two things—its sea-fogs and its Nonconformists. We can keep the Nonconformists outside our gates, but we cannot keep out the sea-fogs."

"We have fogs here."

"Ah, but what different fogs! Light as gossamer, dove-hued like mother-of-pearl, parting to show a rosy sail with a Madonna's crown, or the marble saints of

the Salute dome! My dear, you cannot speak of this fog and of those fogs in the same breath. The one is a film of lace off the Virgin's altars, the other is Hodge's smock hung up to dry!"

She looked at him with a certain expression which he did not admire.

"And you do not care whether Hodge has a shirt or not?"

Guilderoy laughed impatiently.

"I care very much when the shirt figures metaphorically as a fog! My dear child, pray do not become a politician. Become anything else you like that pleases you, but not that. We have too many of them already. We have also already got too many undigested opinions. All opinions require long rumination, only unfortunately it is a process unknown to politicians. You are a very lovely woman, Gladys. You will be handsomer still every year for some time to come. Leave opinions alone, my love. If you must have them, being your father's true daughter, do not spoil your pretty mouth by their utterance."

A shadow went over her face. She had acute intelligence and she did not like to be relegated to the level which his words implied.

"Am I only to dress then like a lay-figure?" she said a little angrily.

"And amuse yourself and look beautiful. Can you want more?"

"There is so much more in life," she murmured with timidity.

"In life, there is no doubt. But in yours it is best there should not be more for many a long year. You

are so young, and I avow, my dear, that I have a horror of women who study blue-books and correct one's statistics by their own tables. The only office of every woman who can be so is to be charming."

"I am not charming," said the girl, with colour in her cheeks.

"You will be. You see I am quite frank with you. In our relations mere compliments are a mistake. You will be infinitely charming when you realise that you are so. At present your power to charm is not more intelligible to you than the use of a knife to an infant: the infant has not the faintest idea of any difference between the blade and the haft. Nor do you discern between the natural beauties which you possess, which are very great, and those which you can exercise by taking thought, which will be still greater."

"I do not understand," said Gladys.

"No," reflected Guilderoy, "and that is why the innocent woman is always hopelessly left behind in the race for men's passions. She does not know, and she does not make art supplement nature; and she says what she thinks; and she shows what she feels; and she cries when we would laugh and laughs when we could cry, and is cold when we are hot and then would warm us when we are cold—alas, alas; why is virtue always like that?"

Aloud he said to her:

"You will understand when you go out in the world and meet other women. You will observe then that frequently the women who have least beauty but most charm bear all before them. It is a question of mind, of perception, of sympathies—perhaps of other things

less innocent, but certainly of them. A lovely woman with perfect features and form (as you have) will be admired, no doubt, always; but her admirers will pass on unless she has some charm beside her beauty. "Know thyself" was said by a sage for sages, but it is quite as necessary a counsel to give to a lovely woman. You do not know yourself. You are half asleep. Whenever you become a little conscious of your power you are frightened. Well, if your mirror teaches you so little, look at other women and learn from them that you can easily surpass them. I do not intend to shut you up in a cabinet at Ladysrood like a Tanagra figure; I want you to be admired by the world, by my friends, by every one; and to be that you must not be afraid of admiration."

He had no consciousness of the perils which might lie in the counsels he gave; he was absorbed in his desire to give the setting it wanted to this pearl he had found, and to escape ridicule in the world as the husband of a woman who was in love with him. He spoke in entire sincerity. He did not, indeed, tell her that he found her wanting himself; but he vaguely endeavoured to imply it. She would be none the less innocent if she gained in pliability, in facility, in power of charm, and she would be a million times more interesting, and more easily adapted to the world before her.

"You will have a great deal to do once you are *lancée*," he continued. "The life of society is full of small things and of continual stir; it is a *strenua inertia*, but it leaves little time for contemplation. You will find your hours gone before you have begun to count them. Certainly it is very good of you to wish to be

of use to others, but you will not find it easy; and all the parade of philanthropy which women of rank deal in is rather an insult to the poor than a kindness to them. I do not wish you to be conspicuous in that way; give all you please, my dear; give with both hands; but pray avoid all appearance of political advertisement and sentimental religion. Both are equally offensive to good taste."

She did not reply; she looked at the crescents of light which were beginning to kindle along the lines and arches of the Procuratie. She was thinking passionately and painfully, "If I did not please him why does he not let me alone?"

"I do not wish to vex you, my child, and youth is always charming," said Guilderoy lightly, "but I want you to realise that you are very lovely through the grace of nature, and that you may become still more so by the grace of art. That is all. I would rather teach you this myself than let others teach it you. Your own ideal, I know, is to live at Ladysrood and be kind to Hodge. You shall be as kind to him as you please—though he will like you none the better for it—but you must live in the world, and the world does not care even for Helen unless Helen has her girdle of charms."

"But if I please you?"

"Please others to please me," said Guilderoy aloud. And he thought to himself: "As men are made, my dear, unless you please others you will, alas! not please me long."

"I quite admit, my dear child," he pursued, "that a life passed in the country is infinitely easier and infinitely more likely to develop high thoughts and gentle

ones. I am convinced that the wretched fretful pessimism, which is the curse of modern art and literature, comes from the men who follow literature and art crowding together in cities, and leading the feverish existence of the clubs and the streets. Their blood grows poor and feeble, and their meditations and views are all tinged with the hypochondria due to bad air, overfeeding, and unending excitement. I am really convinced of it. If cities continue to spread as they have done in the last fifty years, there will not be a book worth reading written, or a picture worth seeing painted. For the majority of men who can never be, and are never, rich or famous, life in great cities must be pent up, jaundiced, deprived of all health, whilst for those who are rich or who achieve fame life in cities means incessant friction, emulation, bitterness, elation, jealousy, and haste. Nothing great or good can come out of the seething cauldron of life in London or Paris, and all good men have loved solitude and nature. Tusculum contributed more than Rome to the genius of Cicero.

"And yet," he continued with a smile, "I who am not Cicero and am not even a modern poet or novelist or painter, I frankly confess that the life of the world is necessary, and the climate of my own country intolerable to me for nine months out of the year. You will say, or if you do not say you will think, that like so many others I can see what is good yet shun it. Yes: in that I am a man of my generation. In no age more than in our own, I think, did men see more clearly all that life might and ought to be, and fail more utterly in making it even tolerable to themselves."

He had forgotten that he was speaking beyond the comprehension of his companion; that she knew nothing of the moral phthisis of pessimism and the chronic typhoid of unrest. He forgot that the country meant to her only red roses, green grass, a boat on a summer wave, a swing between two orchard trees, pet doves flying in the sunshine, and a pet kid nibbling flowers—all the freedom, the playtime and the sport of eager healthful limbs, which it does mean to all innocent and vigorous early life, whether of the sheep-fold, of the cattle-byre, or of the human race.

She did not contradict him, merely because she did not understand.

"My father lives in the country, and you always say that he is very clever!" she observed after a long silence.

"Your father is above humanity," said Guilderoy impatiently. "Nay, forgive me, my dear; I have the greatest honour and regard for Mr. Vernon, but he cannot be taken as a rule for anybody but himself, for no one else has his wonderful power of self-denial, coupled with the contradictory power of sufficing to himself. He is a *nature d'élite*. I am made of less fine clay. I admit that I weary myself consumedly when I have been a little while in my own company. I have been too used to the movement of the world."

"I think I weary you, too," said the girl in her own soul, but she did not utter her thought aloud.

As he spoke he started and half rose from his chair. He saw a lady dressed in black from head to foot coming through the people, followed by a tall footman in amber-coloured livery laced with silver, and accom-

panied by several young men, and one large Russian greyhound.

"Good heavens!" Guilderoy murmured unconsciously aloud, as he mechanically lifted his hat as she passed him.

She acknowledged the salutation with a slight bow, and passed on through the throng towards the piazza. She did not even glance at his companion.

"Who is that beautiful woman?" asked Gladys.

"Guilderoy did not reply. He had grown pale, and his eyes had a startled look.

"She knows you," the girl persisted innocently. "Do tell me who she is?"

"It is the Duchess Soria," he replied.

"Is she one of those I am to imitate?" said the child a little sadly.

"No one could ever be like her," said Guilderoy hastily; and if his companion had had a little more experience in such matters, she would have heard in his voice that tone with which a man never speaks but of some woman whom he loves, or whom he at least remembers tenderly that he has loved.

She did not understand, but she vaguely comprehended that he did not wish to speak more on the subject.

Very soon afterwards Guilderoy suggested a return to their gondola on the score that the evening was chilly. When they reached his palace he stayed behind to say a few words to the gondolier. The man brought him word an hour later, in answer to his command, that the Duchess Soria was staying at the Palazzo Contarini.



Throughout dinner he was abstracted and inattentive. After dinner he paced the long drawing-rooms from end to end impatiently, wondering how he should escape the girl's observation, and go where he wanted to go.

"Might we not go on the water again?" she asked him wistfully. They often went out after dinner, when the moon was full as it was this night; and she had an uneasy sense that he was wearied and impatient of her company.

"It is too old," he answered as in a reverie; and he continued to pace up and down the chambers.

"Cold!"—it seemed to her as warm as a midsummer evening in England.

"I think it is too cold for you," he answered impatiently. "If you would not mind, I would go out alone."

Her ear was quick and fine, and caught the accent of petulance at any constraint. With great self-constraint she forbore to notice it.

"Oh, pray go!" she said willingly. "I am rather tired; I should be glad to rest in my room."

He did not give her credit for the effort because he did not perceive it: he was only glad that she did not oppose his departure.

"Good-night, dear," he said with real tenderness, for he was grateful to her, and he kissed her fondly; yet he felt irritated at the kind of obligation inferred by the semi-apology made for his absence.

True, it was no more than courtesy would have made him offer to any woman dependent on him for society and companionship; but the sense that he had

to account for his actions irritated and weighed on him. The sweetness and simplicity with which she accepted his excuses did not soothe away the sense of subjection which fretted him in making them. It is because men feel the necessity to explain that they drop into the habit of saying what is not true. Their explanations cannot be always true; it is impossible that they should be so. Wise is the woman who never insists on an explanation which if given must be, in the nature of things, either an offence to her or an untruth.

Perhaps more than half the happiness of life, whether in love or marriage, consists in having learnt the art of gliding over, as though it were unperceived, that which we are not desired to perceive. That few women have this delicate art, or possess the self-control and self-negation which are required for its exercise, is a fact which lies at the root of a great deal of human unhappiness and disunion.

The innate delicacy of John Vernon's daughter supplied the place of tact in her, and her mind was too childlike and unsophisticated to harbour jealousy, however vague.

"He would not have chosen me if he had not preferred me to all others," she would no doubt have said had any Mephistopheles been there to pour into her ear self-doubts and the restlessness of suspicion.

But a vague feeling, which was the most womanlike of any which she had hitherto felt, came over her; a feeling older and sadder than her years. She thought to herself wistfully, "Why did he want me with him if he be not happy anywhere with me?"

It was the pathetic, unwise wonder of the woman in a child's heart.

She heard one gondolier cry to the other, "Palazzo Contarini," and the oars fell with a gentle splash into the water. She watched the gondola as far as she could follow it with her eyes. The moonlight fell full on the canal, and it was visible until the curve by the Rialto hid it from sight. The slow, soft, noiseless movement, which had something amorous in its languor and caress of the water, was as unlike the abrupt and noisy movement of her boat over the grey, salt water at home, as her present life was like her past.

Her elbows rested on the silk cushions which covered the marble and her head rested on her hands; her eyelashes were wet with tears, she could not very well have said why except that the vague impatience in his tone and the demand on her to be something other than she was seemed to weigh on her heart with a heavy sense of her own inefficiency to content him. His affections were hers; he had said so a thousand times, and he had proved it as far as a man can do so; and yet she felt that he was disappointed in her, impatient of her, wanted her in some way unlike what she was.

She withdrew from the window, and bade her woman shut the casement, though the moon was pouring its radiance through the chamber, as on Christabel's. She was too young to feel jealousy, and too accustomed to obedience to feel rebellious; yet a vague, unanalysed pain was in her heart. Would he be long? she wondered.

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## CHAPTER XV.

GUILDEROY meantime went on with a quickly beating heart to the water-gate of the Palazzo Contarini.

"Is it possible that I love her still?" he asked himself uneasily as his boat glided through the green shadowy waters, through the deep black shadows, and the glistening breadths of light where the moonbeams fell. He had thought not. An hour before he would have sworn that he did not.

The noble palace, turning its Gothic buttresses and machicolations to the little canal of the Priuli, towered above him as his gondola touched its water-stairs.

"Take up my name," said Guideroy to a servant whom he recognised at the entrance.

He stood on the edge of the steps and waited. The water flowed past him bronze-green in the full moonlight with a melancholy and monotonous sound in its ebb and flow. With one of the strange contradictions of human temper he passionately regretted a privilege which he had abandoned of his own accord; a time when the servants of Beatrice Sorla showed him into her presence unannounced and sure of welcome. Of his own free will he had broken off those terms of privileged intimacy, and he knew well enough that he

had desired to do so before he had taken the resolve to do it. And yet he regretted, and would have had these privileges once more if he had been able to command them. He despised his own inconstancy, but he could not control its regrets and its forebodings.

He was kept waiting some little time standing there on the top stair, whilst the gondoliers murmured and laughed with one another, and the reflections of the lamps trembled in the water. Then the servant returned and said:

"Will my lord follow me?"

Guilderoy followed him up the steep stone staircase and across the ante-chamber into a large, vaulted, painted chamber in which the severe beauties of old Venetian art were blent with the luxurious litter of modern taste. The room was faintly lighted from wax candles burning in the wall sconces; the air was odorous with the scent of many lilies of the valley. The Duchess Sorla was reclining on a couch at the further end. As he advanced the room seemed to him endless, the time consumed in passing through it appeared a century. He had never in his life before known the sensation of embarrassment: he knew it now.

She aided him in no way. She turned her head and looked at him as he came towards her, but she did not move until he was quite close to her. Then she raised herself slightly on one elbow and put out her left hand; the one nearer him.

"My dear friend," she said with a little smile, "let me felicitate you. I saw Lady Guilderoy on the Piazza. She is very beautiful, but surely she is very young? A *beau défaut*; yes, we always say that. It would be

*plus beau* if when we were young we had wit enough to know the happiness we enjoyed. When did you come? When will you go away? I have this house for a fortnight. Then I go to Paris, as you know is my habit at this season."

Guilderoy murmured something, he knew not what. He was so surprised and troubled by the easy indifference of a reception so different to the scene of passionate reproaches for which he had been prepared, that he could not recover his composure. He remained standing, gazing down at her while the colour came and went on his cheek.

She was unmoved; she had been for days prepared for such a meeting. Women are always in extremes. When they lose their self-control they lose it entirely in a terrible abandonment to all their passions; when they are mistress of themselves they are, on the contrary, wholly under the domination of their colder and their more merciless instincts, and all the storms of emotions assail their composure in vain.

"You never answered my letter," he said almost involuntarily. It was what a boy would have said and he knew it, and yet he could not restrain the words.

"What was the use of answering it?" she replied in the same even and languid tone. "'Cosa fatta capo ha.' What is done is done. You know the proverb."

"But it was not done, then!"

"What did you expect? That I should entreat you for my sake to pause and change your mind? My dear friend, you were very vain."

"Vain!" repeated Guilderoy.

He knew that he could not recall to her passions

and affections which he had voluntarily thrown back on her hands. He could not remind her of her past love for him, when that love had been wholly incapable of retaining his allegiance.

"You must have but a paltry opinion of me," he said, with a flush of mortification.

"You are not heroic. Men are not heroes except in their own eyes. You wished to marry. You married. There is no more to be said. I hope it may agree with you. It does not agree with most people."

Guilderoy was silent and embarrassed. For more years than one his greatest emotion with regard to her had been impatience and readiness to dispute with her. He had told himself a thousand times that, without difficulty or danger or novelty or any future good in it, passion became wearisome, and had no power to hold him. And yet, now that this passion was altogether of the past, it allured him back to it. It assumed a thousand hues which it had never worn before.

Had he in truth, he asked himself now, always loved her, though he had disliked her exactions, her despotism, and her caprice? If he had not, how was it that the mere sound of her name, the mere touch of her hand, had had power to awaken so much in him that he had imagined was dead?

She was still reclining on a pile of silk cushions and oriental stuffs; her arms were bare to the shoulder, and with one hand she moved up and down the coils of an emerald bracelet on the other arm. His eyes followed the movement of the jewel up and down the soft pale flesh, polished as ivory, where his lips so often

had lingered. Paradise was shut to him now, and he had closed the doors himself, and he regretted it.

She was a very beautiful woman, then eight-and-twenty years old. She was tall and exquisitely formed, whilst her face had the rich hued fairness of Titian's women, warm as a sun-fed fruit. She had the blood of many different races in her veins, Arragonese, Sicilian, Venetian, and French, and she had had for many years all the habits, the experiences, the wisdom, and the charms of a woman accustomed to reign in the greatest of great societies. Her marriage could not be called a happy one, but it was not positively unhappy; she enjoyed a large fortune wholly secured to her, and Hugo Soria was wholly indifferent to what she did so long as she preserved an outward agreement with himself; they appeared in public or at great courts together a dozen times a year, and he and the world were satisfied.

She was not. She was a woman of strong passions and warm affections, which the habits of the world had not destroyed in her. All the heart she had—and it was much—she had thrown into her relations with Guilderoy; and though those relations had before his rupture with her been often strained and marred by scenes of dissension, they had yet remained the central interest of her life. When the tidings of his marriage had reached her she had received the greatest blow that it is possible for a proud woman to receive. The wildest desires of vengeance had passed through her disordered thoughts, only resisted because they seemed too melodramatic, too common, and too poor. All her empire had crumbled into dust, and she suffered as lowlier and more patient women could not do.



She had not answered his letter because it had seemed to her that there was no answer possible. You do not answer an insult unless you can avenge it. She could not avenge this because she was a woman, and a gentlewoman, and she was conscious moreover that she had often strained his patience to breaking by her exactions and her caprices; that he had excuse if not justification in his effort to secure for his future more peaceable and more fruitful attachments.

So she had replied nothing to his message of farewell; and when now she had been asked to receive him she had consented, and had done so as a friend.

She had no distinct motive or project in her mind; she was actuated partly by pride, which moved her to conceal her wound, and partly by a vague desire not to lose sight of his life altogether.

She broke the silence at last.

"Your wife is very lovely," she said again. "Quite an English beauty, but with something more sensitive in it and more suggestive than there is in most English girls' faces. Is she *facile*? Because you are not, my dear friend, and in marriage it is extremely necessary that one at least should be so. She is a child, you say? Yes, I see she is a child at present, but she will not be always a child; and in marriage so very often one is so inconveniently in love for a long time while the other has forgotten and rebels."

Guilderoy gave an impatient gesture. He had not come there to discuss the philosophy of marriage with the wife of Sorla.

"You do not like to talk about her?" said the Duchess.

"There is nothing to talk about; she is very young, and she has seen nothing of the world."

"The real *ingénue*? It is so strange, but men of the world are so often enamoured of that type; and yet there are few things more tiresome than a mind which is incapable of sympathy, because it has no knowledge and no experience. Some women are tiresome like that all their lives—they are the good women!"

She laughed a little, and added:

"I will come and see her to-morrow. What hour suits her?"

Guilderoy coloured. He wished to Heaven that they should never meet, and yet it was impossible to prevent it; and perhaps it was merely a folly on his part to feel that sensitiveness about it. The world was full of such meetings.

"Any hour you will like to name; I will bring her to you," he said, with a visible reluctance which his companion did not choose to observe.

"To-morrow, then, at five."

Guilderoy bowed. He was thinking to himself—it must be that she cares for someone else, or she could never be so cold?

A swift and hateful suspicion flashed through his mind also. Was it possible that she was in real truth indifferent because already she had replaced him? Was that the explanation of her silence, of her apparent forgiveness? Six months and more had gone by since their last meeting. There was time—more than time—for a woman of the world to have substituted one sentiment for another.

He hated the thought. It seemed impossible to him that the love she had borne him could have already gone elsewhere; and yet had not his own passion faded and been false to her? Had he any title to expect from her a constancy which he had not given?

He sat beside her embarrassed and mute; and she watched him under her dreamy long-lashed eyelids. A great depression came over him like a weight of lead; something seemed suddenly to have gone out of his life and left it blank. For many months he had been used to the thoughts of this woman wholly devoted to himself, and suffering from his absence and his inconstancy. He had rebuked himself and hated himself for what had been in his own eyes the cruelty of his desertion of her. In a passionate scene he would have been at his ease, because he would have had what he expected, what he was used to; but before this cool, languid, half-friendly, half-hostile reception of him by a woman whom he had known alternately furious or tender, exquisitely devoted or violently dominant, he was at a loss what to do or what to say. He longed to fall at her feet and implore her pardon, but he felt afraid lest it should seem to her a greater insult than the original offence. If she chose to treat his marriage as a thing without import or interest to her, it was not for him to force on her memories which should remind her that it had been an infidelity to her which she had every right to resent and to condemn.

She had played with him often when he was really hers; she had created his jealousy and irritated his temper; she had often been wayward, despotic, and disposed to overstrain the great power which she had

at one time possessed. At the beginning his love had been much more passionate than hers, but soon the proportions had been reversed, and gradually, as years went on, it had become on her side much greater than on his own. She had allowed her heart to be drawn into what she had once intended should be only a pastime, and she had, with all the fractiousness of passion, set her soul more and more on her kingdom as she felt that its sceptre was more and more likely to slide with time from her grasp. She had really loved him; and it was the knowledge of that which, when he had thought of her, had moved him to the pain of remorse.

And now he found that all his remorse had been needless, all his self-reproaches the exaggerated apprehensions of vanity; for it was evident that of all indifferent matters his marriage had been the most indifferent to this woman, who for five years had seemed to live only through his love!

A wave of hot anger rose over his soul. He regretted his visit to her. He felt that he was insignificant in her eyes, and he longed to reveal to her a thousand things which it was impossible for him even to hint at, since she chose to ignore all their past relations. He could not blame her; he had no possible right to do so. He was aware that most men in his place would have been grateful to her for passing over with so much lightness a difficult and embarrassing position. He knew that he ought to be thankful for her forbearance and her indifference, and yet he felt that he would have preferred that she should have upbraided him, reviled him, struck him, done anything to

him rather than tell him in that tranquil mode to bring his wife to see her.

"Women have no real feeling," he thought furiously; and if she had met him with reproaches he would have said "Women have no comprehension!"

It was one of those situations in which the man must always be irritated with the woman, let her do what she may, because, as he is conscious of having acted ill to her, her forgiveness or her invective must alike appear a rebuke to him. If she had indeed met him with any of that constancy and fervour of passion which had tired him in her, she would have reconciled him to himself. As it was, he felt, with passionate annoyance at his own weakness, that it was quite possible for him to become in the future as much in love with her again as he had been five years before. He rose abruptly, being afraid of what he might be betrayed into if he sat much longer beside her in the silence of this flower-scented, dimly lighted, painted chamber, with no sound on their ear except the ripple of the water below the windows, or the distant cry of some passing gondolier. He had had many affections in his life, but in some ways he had cared more for Beatrice Sorla than for any other woman, and cared longer. Now that he was again in her presence, it seemed strange and unnatural that they should meet and part as mere acquaintances. He was a man of tender heart if of variable passions, and he could not wholly restrain some of the emotion which he felt.

"You will, at least, allow me to be always your friend?" he murmured, as he bent over her hand.

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"Why not?" she replied, with a charmed sweetness in the words; but they were wholly calm, and had no answering emotion in them.

He held her hand a moment, then touched it with his lips and left her. The heavy tapestry hanging before the door closed on him. Alone, she rose from her couch with the feverish impetuosity of some wounded animal, and paced to and fro the length of the chamber with quick, nervous, agitated steps.

Strong passions and deep pain, scorn, regret, and desire, and the wrath of a proud nature under insult, all which she had successfully repressed and hidden in his presence, over-mastered her in solitude.

As she heard the sound of the oars in the water as his gondola left the palace steps, she threw herself face forward on the cushions of her couch once more, and with her head bowed on her beautiful bare arms she wept bitterly.

She was a woman of the world, and she had worn the mask of the worldly: partly from pride, partly from desire to renew an association which would perforce be severed for ever were any angry words exchanged. She knew that the impetuosity and dominance of her temper had wearied out a love which she had prized more than any other she had ever enjoyed, and she had subjugated her will and subdued her sense of passionate resentment, to make them the slaves of her purpose and her desire to regain her lost influence.

But the reaction was great, and when alone she had no composure to affect, no indifference to simulate, she abandoned herself to the convulsive and unrestrained

grief of a woman who is only sensible that she has, for the time at least, lost all which has made existence sweet to her.

## CHAPTER XVI.

THE next day at five o'clock he was not at his ease, and Gladys was timid and silent. The Duchess Soria alone was at her ease; full of charm and animation, graciously kind, and most brilliant, as she could be when she chose. Nothing could be more admirable than her manner to the young girl, and Gladys looked and listened with a vague perception of what he had meant by his warning to herself on the Piazzetta.

She could never be like this exquisite woman with her perfect grace, her low sweet laugh, her easy gliding from one language to another, her delicate touches of wit which just brushed its subject and left an epigram on it, as though her lips dropped diamonds like the queen's of the fairy story. The sense of her own inferiority made the girl twice as shy and twice as self-conscious as she had ever been before. All the child-like frankness and courage which had been so naturally hers before her marriage had evaporated. She was almost mute, and blushed painfully whenever she was forced to speak.

Guilderoy felt passionately angered against her.

"She will make the other think that I have married a fool!" he said bitterly to himself, with the same restless irritating consciousness that a man feels who has

bought a jewel at great price, and sees it subject to the contemplation of a supreme connoisseur in gems, only to be condemned as worthless.

There was a look in the eyes of Beatrice Sorla which made him writhe; not quite derision, not quite contempt, but cruelly hinting both.

"Is it for this you have left me?" said the lustrous and languid glance of those eyes in which he had once seen all his heaven, and was so tempted to see it still.

"What inferior creatures we are to women!" thought Guilderoy. "We are fools enough to be troubled by what seems to us an equivocal situation, a want of decency or dignity, but a woman carries off any false position with the most consummate ease; she is never at a loss for brilliant conventionalities, she is never shaken by a consciousness of inopportune memories; you may have left her chamber half-an-hour before, but she will present you with perfect self-possession to her acquaintances in her drawing-rooms!"

If she had refused to receive his wife, he would have accused her of jealousy, and of the desire to create a painful scene; he would have said that women carried so far too much earnestness into passing passions, and desired to give permanence to intimacies which should be evanescent.

But he, who thought that he knew the whole gamut of female emotions, was perplexed to explain to himself, now, the motive and the character of her feelings.

There was an unaffected kindness and sweetness in her manner to Gladys which was the perfection of acting, if acting it were. The young girl was bewitched and fascinated by it; and, when they had left the



Palazzo Contarini, was full of the expressions of her admiration, to which he found it somewhat difficult to reply.

For one moment, as they glided over the water homeward, he felt an impulse to tell her the story of his relations to the Duchess Soria. He felt that it would create a certain confidence and clearness between them; that it would enable her to guide her own conduct and understand his own in the future; but the words were difficult to utter. He had the intimate sense which every man who is a gentleman feels so strongly, that to speak of a woman's passion for himself is a cowardice and a vulgarity. He felt that he should repent it for ever after if he were to be guilty of such an offence against the unwritten laws of honour. Moreover, he was conscious that he could not speak of her with total indifference, because he was not indifferent. And then, again, what would Gladys comprehend? She was such a child: she would probably be disgusted, alarmed, and wholly unable to understand either the confession or his motives for making it. So he kept silence, and merely responded with acquiescence to her repeated interrogations and affirmations of enthusiastic admiration of the grace, the beauty, and the charm of her great rival.

"You will be as charming yourself when you know a little more of the world," he replied, with a touch of impatience at the last.

"I shall never be like that," said the girl despondently.

"You do not want to be; you are young; youth has its own charm."

"But you told me I wanted to improve so much?"

"If I did I was a fool. You need not always take seriously what I say, my dear. Men often have *boutades*; they are only spoilt children. Women are very unwise, and are always very unhappy, who attach too much importance to our idle words."

Gladys was silent. She was wondering how she was to know when he wished to have his words taken seriously and when he did not. Her father's clear, limpid, straightforward speech had always been so intelligible to her. She had had no experience of the caprices and involutions of speech used only to conceal the speaker's thoughts, or aimlessly to discharge the doubts and the desires at war in the speaker's mind. But her intelligence and the delicacy of her apprehensions told her that in some way her praise of the Duchess Soria was distasteful to him. She talked of her no more.

After leaving the Palace they had gone down the Grand Canal and out towards the Lido. Venice was at her most beautiful moment (unless, indeed, daybreak be not still more beautiful), the sun was setting behind the city, and the golden glow suffused the water, the sky, the earth, and made the ships and the isles, and the buildings of the Schiavone look like the translucent images seen in a mirage.

Venice is the heaven of lovers; yet Guilderoy already felt that he had ceased to be a lover as he drifted through the sparkling sunshine or the starry nights by the side of his young companion. When there is absolutely no response, passion soon grows tired alike of its demands and of its persuasions. He

had been used to women who studied, stimulated, caressed, and tempted him. She was too young to do the first of these, and too ignorant of her own charms and powers to do the others. He remained wholly unaware of the mingled and contradictory emotions with which this mute soul regarded him. The eloquent expression of passion is more than half its attraction, and the devotion of the heart is useless unless the intelligence is sufficiently awake to unite it to influence.

"I shall not see Madame Soria again?" she said, as the gondola drifted up the canal an hour later, and passed the Contarini Palace, in which the windows were all lighted *a giorno*.

"Why should you want to see her?" he replied with petulance. "I thought you were shy of strangers. Be quite sure, however, that you will see her, over and over again, in the world."

He turned his head away as they neared the lighted palace; he hated to think that others were there beside Beatrice Soria, others perchance who had succeeded to the same privileges and the same intimacy which had once been his.

He had voluntarily abandoned them, but he regretted them bitterly now; even as a man might in a fit of passion fling a collar of pearls into the green water of the canal, and regret his act when it had sunk for ever out of sight under the seaweed and the sand.

"Do you intend to be mute for ever, as you were before her, before all my friends?" he said irritably, as they passed under San Giorgio Maggiore, feeling forced to vent his irritation in some way. "I really cannot understand you, my dear; you have spirit enough when

you choose. Do you mean to sit like a country mouse in all London and Paris drawing-rooms? Do you mean to make no effort to attain the tone and the air of the world you have to live in? You will make me supremely absurd if you remain a mere country girl. In your present position——”

He checked himself, for his good breeding made him conscious that he could not reproach or remind her of social advantages which she had received from himself.

Gladys' eyes filled with tears. Whenever her father had reproved her it had been with gentle gravity and reasonableness, not with petulant irritation like this.

“For Heaven's sake do not do that!” cried Guilderoy, angry with himself, and so still more angered against her. “*Les femmes pleureuses* are my abhorrence. If there be anything on earth I have avoided all my life it is tears!”

“I beg your pardon,” said the girl coldly. There was a menace he did not like in the tone, and he said nothing.

“Will she not be *facile à vivre?*” he thought uneasily; it was the quality he most prized: he had never met with it. His sister did not possess it; Beatrice Sorla had not possessed it, nor had any one of the many women he had loved; it seemed to him the one good thing upon earth, chiefly because he had always sought and never found it. And, indeed, in a sense he was right in his estimate, if his estimate sprang from his own selfishness. Of what use is it for those who love us to say that they do so if they cannot bear with our

infirmities, pardon our weaknesses, and make the atmosphere of our lives sweet and clear?

"If you would like to go to England," he said abruptly, "I have no objection. You can go to the first Drawing-room instead of the second, and we can go to Ladysrood for Whitsuntide. Your father would be pleased, no doubt."

The warmth with which she thanked him made him feel very insincere towards her. If she could have known his motives for being desirous to leave Venice, she would have seen that consideration of her wishes or of John Vernon's pleasure had very little to do with it.

But ignorance, that kindest friend of trustful natures, kept her from such knowledge, and she was grateful and happy.

On the morrow he sent a letter to the Palazzo Contarini, in which he expressed his regret that he was recalled suddenly to England, and must thus lose the honour of seeing the Duchess Sorla again in Venice. It flattered Beatrice Sorla to learn that he should have left Venice with so much precipitation.

Men only flee from what they fear, not from what is indifferent.

"What is the use of his flying from me?" she thought. "The world—our world—is so narrow; we must meet again and again in it."

He had killed what was best and warmest and sweetest in her, as men do without thinking how they destroy the better qualities of women. They think that they have full title to a woman's fealty and forbearance, though they may have shown neither forbearance nor fealty themselves, and they demand from her super-

human virtues at the very hour that they do things to her which would make an angel a fiend. There arose in her now, in the place of her warm impetuous passions, a colder and unkindler passion, which had the patience to wait and the wisdom to affect tranquillity.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"AND Lady Guilderoy, what is she like?" asked an old friend of Lady Sunbury, in a crowded London ball-room.

"She is a charming child, but such a child!" she replied with a sigh.

"You have forgiven her, then?" asked Lord Aubrey, who was standing near.

"There is nothing to forgive. Your advice was sound. It would have been very stupid to quarrel. But if you ask me whether I believe the marriage is for Guilderoy's ultimate peace, I do not."

"Why?"

"For a thousand reasons. You always repent at leisure when you marry in haste. Then she is too young. A great charm you say? Yes, but sometimes a very costly one. She will only be happy in the country, and he is only happy in the world. Is he in love, do you say? My impression is that he is not. She is!"

"That is ominous, and early. If he is not, why on earth did he marry?"

"Ah!"

Lady Sunbury moved her fan in a gesture suggestive

of her impotence to account for the extravagancies of any man. "Evelyn is very capricious and has *coups de tête* which are often wholly unaccountable. This was a *coup de tête*. Now that he has outgrown its momentary excitement I think he looks at his wife and wonders what he was about."

"A happy prospect for her."

"*On s'habitue à tout*," said Lady Sunbury with little sympathy in troubles of the soul. "He will always be very kind to her—Evelyn can be unkind to nothing—and he will be very courteous and generous: if she be reasonable she will not want more; she can enjoy herself in any way she likes. I hope she will be reasonable."

"How old did you say she was?"

"Seventeen, I think."

"It is not the age of reason," said Lord Aubrey, and as he wandered away through the rooms he felt a vague pity for this young girl whom he had never seen, who was to be content with the courtesy of her husband, and with the power of spending money. Most women wanted no more, it was true, but here and there was a woman who did want more, and who having no more was wretched.

Aubrey attended the Drawing-room a few days later with some feeling of curiosity. Presentations seldom interested him. He did not care much for women. But this time he looked on with interest, as Lady Sunbury presented her young sister-in-law.

"She may be a child, but she has the *sang-froid* of race in her," he thought, as he saw Gladys come before the throne with the same calmness with which she had

fronted the Cherriton lads on the Ladysrood moors. She scarcely looked her best, because the Court dress was too stately for her extreme youth, and the Guilderoys jewels seemed too many and too heavy for her small head and her childlike shoulders to sustain; but she carried herself with perfect grace and repose. She was undisturbed by the novelty of the scene and the magnificence of the crowd; and her cheeks were as cool, and her pulse as even, as though she had been in the porch under the apple boughs and the ivy of Christslea.

"There is the Princess royal in your lovely Perdita," said Aubrey to Guilderoys.

Guilderoys assented with a smile: he was proud of her and, for the moment, content. Occasionally, as his sister had guessed, he surveyed what he had done with a sense of wonder and vague uneasiness, half troubled even whilst half pleased to find her always before him. But he was well satisfied that she should be his as he heard the murmurs of admiration around him.

"I do not wonder any longer that you married her," said Aubrey.

"I wonder myself still sometimes," said Guilderoys. "But I am disposed to hope that it was the one wise act of a not wise life."

Aubrey was silent. The wisdom of it did not seem to him so apparent as the temptation to it. He admired his cousin in many things, but in others he blamed, and in others he doubted him. "He has been a spoiled child of pleasure and of women so long," he thought, "will he understand the fragility of this new plaything, or care for it if he do understand it?"

"You are thinking that I shall ill-treat her," said



Guilderoy, annoyed by what he fancied the other's silence meant. "I assure you every one has prophesied the same, even her father and my sister. I do not know why; I have not been in the habit of ill-treating women."

"You have been in the habit of leaving them," said Aubrey. "Sometimes that comes to the same thing."

They were at that moment separated by the crush, and Guilderoy was spared the trouble of denial or reply.

Aubrey had at no time very much patience with his cousin. Laborious and self-denying, strongly patriotic and accepting a vast amount of responsibilities which he hated because he believed them not to be conscientiously avoided, he viewed with impatience the useless brilliancy of Guilderoy's intelligence, its scholarly indolence and its ingenious sophisms. The very inward sense which he sometimes could not help feeling that Guilderoy was right enough in his easy-going pessimism and his epicurean choice of the paths of life, only served to make him the more impatient of a man who was theoretically so selfish and yet practically so wise.

"Evelyn has been so spoilt by fortune," Lady Sunbury said to him once.

"No doubt," replied Aubrey, but in himself he felt that circumstances had conspired to spoil himself quite as much, but had not similarly succeeded, because his natural indolence had been striven against by a strong sense of the responsibilities of position.

"I do not know that I have done any good," he thought honestly enough, "but at least I have not been idle."

He went home from the Drawing-room that day with a vague sense of pity for the girl he had called Perdita. His pity was no doubt absurd enough; the world would have told him so certainly, and yet he could not avoid the sense of it.

"Evelyn will not make her happy, because he will not be happy with her," he thought. "We cannot give what we do not possess."

"I regret to disagree with you," he said an hour later to his cousin Hilda in her own house. "I am charmed with his wife, but the marriage will not be happy; she will not be contented with dressing exquisitely and spending money."

"Then she will be very ungrateful," said Lady Sunbury, whose pride was pinched day and night by want of adequate means to meet the demands of her position. "I seriously believe that the only one grave and hopeless ill in life is want of money; it brings about all others, it poisons every hour, and it makes good temper absolutely unattainable. This girl is a baby, and sentimental. She will possibly cry her eyes out because he looks five minutes too long at another woman. But when that stage has passed, as it always passes, she will grow sensible of the advantages of always having her bills paid without question."

"That will depend on whether her temperament is susceptible of delight in running up bills."

"Every woman has *that* temperament. Pray do not irritate me any further. I opposed the marriage absolutely so long as it was of any use to do so; it was an absurd one, a caprice, a folly. I have only accepted it to prevent the world talking, and because I

cannot quarrel for life with the head of my family; but I do not profess to approve of it, and if she is to be made into a sentimental heroine as a *femme incomprise* I shall detest her. She has had an immense, a most amazing, piece of good fortune, I beseech you do not irritate me by pitying her for it!"

"I certainly will not irritate you," said Aubrey, who knew that she could irritate herself unaided.

Lady Sunbury, though she had become reconciled, believed no more in the wisdom of this marriage than she had done when she had been its most dogged opponent.

"I know him," she continued to her cousin, "and I know that he is one of those men who, without in the least intending it, make women as wretched ultimately as they make them radiantly happy at the onset. My brother has not a harsh fibre in his whole nature (he says that I absorbed them all), but whether I did or not he has none; yet I am quite sure that he renders every woman he loves much more unhappy than many colder and worse men do."

"Because he ceases to care so soon?"

"Partly that, and partly because there is that about Evelyn which women cannot forget. He will not understand why they do not forget as completely and as easily as he does, and so there is wretchedness."

"That was with his amours, but surely here——"

"His marriage is in feeling only an amour too; only an amourette. When he has come to the end of it he will be supremely astonished to find that it leaves restraints and obligations upon him which amourettes have not."

"Perhaps he will get rid of them also."

"You cannot get rid of marriage. Unless your wife disgraces herself you can never get rid of it."

"In our day it is at least worn lightly if not got rid of, yet it is always there," said Aubrey. "You are like a prisoner who has given his parole and goes wherever he pleases; he walks and wanders where he will, and he can saunter, or sit, or sleep, or swim; and the sun and the rain fall on him, and he sees all the living world and the wide horizon, but he has given his parole to go back, and it is all poisoned for him."

"In marriage at least the parole is not often kept," said Lady Sunbury.

At six o'clock Aubrey went and called on his cousin's wife in the great Palladian mansion which had ever since it was built been the town house of the Guilderoy family. It was a noble house in its way, with a staircase of black and white marble, and ceilings by Italian artists of the period, and stately reception-rooms which had seen many generations of fine gentlemen and fine ladies pass through them like painted shadows on a wall. He found the girl alone in a little cabinet hung with French paintings of the Watteau and Lancret time, and in which every chair, table, and console and guéridon were now heaped with roses. She looked pale amidst the brilliant flowers and the sparkling pictures; her eyes had still the dreamy, half-awake look which had fascinated Guilderoy, but they had a look of fatigue as well.

"I hope you will let me greet you as a relative as I could not do at the palace just now," said Lord Aubrey; and he bent his head and lightly touched her

cheek with his lips. He pitied her intensely; it was wholly absurd that he should do so, and he knew it, and yet he could not resist the impulse of compassion. He could understand all that she felt of bewilderment, of fatigue, of shyness, and of apprehension before this new life which had descended on her with such startling suddenness and splendour.

"You must have thought us all boors not to come to your marriage," he continued, "but it was your father's and Evelyn's desire to have none present. We did not even know on what day it was. I am so glad, my dear, that I am the first to see you. We must be great friends, as well as cousins. Will you allow me that honour?"

She smiled. Her smile was still the spontaneous, unstudied, glad smile of a child. She felt grateful to Aubrey, and the sound of his voice and the pressure of his hand seemed to her full of kindness and protection.

"Did I do right to-day, do you know, at the Court?" she asked him. "I think he was satisfied, was he not?"

"If he were not," began Aubrey,—then checked himself, and answered quietly, "You did perfectly, and it was a great ordeal; it was so crowded. You have never seen anything of this London world of ours, I think?"

She shook her head.

"I want to go to Ladysrood. They brought me all these roses to make it feel like the country. He told them to do it, but it is not the least like the country. I should die if I stayed here."

Aubrey smiled.

"This time next year you will tell me there is no place like London. All women say so."

"I shall not. It is noisy, dark, and ugly."

"It is not beautiful, certainly; but there are many beautiful things to be found in it, and this house is one of them. You will get fond of it in time. At present I daresay you feel like a caged bird. Your jewels tired you, did they not, to-day?"

"Yes, they were very heavy."

Aubrey sighed a little as she spoke.

"So is rank."

She looked at him with curiosity.

"You are *the* Lord Aubrey, are you not?" she asked.

"What do you mean, my dear? No one else has that title, if you mean that?"

"No; I mean that I have heard my father praise you. I have heard him say that if the English nobles were all like you they would have no reason to fear the Deluge."

"That was very good of your father," replied Aubrey, pleased and touched. "I suspect the Deluge would come all the same if all the saints and heroes of Christendom filled our order."

"He does not think that it would."

"He is happy enough to live out of the sphere of practical politics," said Aubrey, with a smile.

"For heaven's sake do not speak to her of politics," said Guilderoy, entering the room. "She has a terrible bias towards them already, and I insist that lovely women should have nothing to do with social questions."

"Her roses suit her better, certainly," replied Aubrey, as his eyes rested on her with a wistful contemplation.

"That child will be very unhappy if she loves him, and probably equally unhappy if she does not," he thought, as he took his leave, and went on his way to the House of Commons.

She interested him. He saw much farther into her nature after half-an-hour's conversation with her than Guilderoy had seen of it after three months of the most intimate association with her.

"He has certainly given her everything that a man can give," thought Aubrey, "and yet I suspect he will never give her the one thing which such a woman as she will become will chiefly want."

Aubrey had little time or inclination in his career to study the intricacies and fragilities of women's temperaments, but he was a man of quick sensibilities and of swift penetration.

He believed in feeling, though the world thought him a cynic. Politics had absorbed most of his own life, and the emotions had not enjoyed much play in it. But perhaps for that reason his sympathies, when they were aroused, had a great freshness in them. People in general were afraid of him, for his wit could be bitter and unsparing; but children or dogs were never afraid.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

"WELL, my dear, what do you think of life?" said John Vernon to his daughter, when they went to Ladysrood for Whitsuntide.

Gladys was standing in his little study. She wore a grey dress with a broad hat, with long ostrich feathers drooping over it; she had a silver belt round her waist, long gloves, and one very large pearl at her throat, with a few pale tea roses. It was only two months since she had left Christslea, and yet she looked to him utterly changed; as changed as though she had been absent for years. She hesitated a little and coloured. It would have been wholly impossible to her to find words for the curious mingling of great joy and of apprehensive disappointment which her marriage had brought to her: the vague sense which she was possessed with that love was at once bitter and sweet.

John Vernon saw the embarrassment she felt, and regretted it. He would have been better satisfied by some youthful outburst of undoubting enthusiasm and ecstasy.

"You have quite a look of the world already," he continued, with a smile. "What a toilette of Paris will do for a child! If it were not too rude to a peeress, I would tell you, my dear, that you are actually grown! And so you wished for our rough seas and leaden skies,



even in Venice? That was very sweet and faithful of you. And yet I think I would sooner hear that you had never thought of us there."

"I should have been very thankless not to think," she said, still with a heightened colour on her cheeks. "Things seemed so much simpler, too, when I was here," she added, after a little pause.

"No doubt they did, since you saw nothing but the poultry and the pigeons," said her father with a smile: whilst he thought, "It is very early for your difficulties to have begun, my poor little princess!"

"In what way does your life seem to have any perplexity?" he asked aloud; "and when you feel any do you not take your puzzles to Guilderoy?"

"I think it would tease him if I did."

"Ah! Then don't do it, dear. Never worry any man. We are fretful creatures, with more nerves than women, though we pretend to have none. My dear Gladys, I was so much opposed to your marriage while you were so young, because I knew that it would not be only a garden of roses for you. There are the roses no doubt, but there are the briars too. You have the pleasures of life, my love, and you must pay for them with the pains. What is it pains you most?"

"I am not sure"—and he saw that she was speaking the truth—"I am not sure that anything pains me. Only I fancy that I am not quite what he wants, what he wishes."

"So soon!" murmured Vernon with a sigh. "I daresay that is imagination, my dear," he said, repressing what he felt.

"When the first ardours of love subside they always

leave a vague disappointment because the fever heat of them cannot be sustained. You are now feeling the reaction which follows them as invariably as evening follows day. If you wish to be really happy, my child, do not doubt and do not analyse. Self-examination is very apt to grow morbid. It has its uses, but it may very easily have its abuses too. You have the faults of youth and inexperience, no doubt, but I do not think they are very grave ones, and they will mend with time."

She was silent some moments. Then she took off her hat and pushed back the hair which hung over her forehead.

"Father, do tell me," she said in a very low voice, "how shall I ever know if he really loves me?"

"My dear child!"

John Vernon was startled and dismayed; he had had his own doubts as to the ultimate happiness of the union, or rather he had had no doubt of it, but a profound conviction that it would bring little happiness to either of them in the end. But he had not expected any shadow to fall quite so soon across the garden of roses, across the brightness of the morning light. He scarcely knew what to say to her.

"Can you doubt it, dear?" he replied evasively. "Surely you cannot. No man can have given greater proof of it than he. If he had not loved you greatly, why should a man of his high position and powers to charm have taken the trouble to woo a little country girl without a penny to her fortune? I think you do Lord Guilderoy injustice and dishonour by your doubt."

She gave a little sign of dissent, faint and sad and incredulous.

"He might think he loved me," she said in a very low voice. "He might think so and then find it was not true—how shall I know? How do women know?"

"Good God! What can he have let her see or feel to put such a cruel fancy in her mind already?" thought Vernon as he looked at her in trouble and anxiety of spirit.

He did not know what to say to her, and he was afraid even to show the anxiety he felt lest it should increase a feeling already morbid and possibly baseless.

"Do *you* care for him?" he said abruptly, looking her full in the face.

"Yes."

A blush rose over her face, and her eyes fell under his gaze. For the first time he failed to see entirely into her thoughts, but he saw that she was very much changed. Possession, which often weakens and chills the heart of the man, usually awakens and enchains the heart of the woman. She had been a child without any knowledge of love on the day when John Vernon had given her hand to Guilderoy in the little church of Christslea; but now, however young she was in years, she was a woman in feeling.

He laid his hands on her shoulders and kissed her forehead.

"Then, my dear," he said, gravely, "do not ask yourself what is, or what is not, the measure of his love. Make yours so great, and keep it so patient, that it shall be a treasure he can never get elsewhere; so

only will you ever attain or bestow real happiness. Do not analyse either love or happiness too much. They are like flowers, like butterflies—they die beneath the lens of the microscope.”

Gladys looked up at him in silence; her face was grave and pale.

He could not tell whether she were satisfied, or dissatisfied, whether she believed in happiness or had already ceased to expect much of it. They said no more, and spoke of other things. Much as he longed to know all the innocent secrecies of her mind, John Vernon would not aid her to continue a self-examination which might so easily become self-torture. He knew that women are at all times over-fond of self-contemplation, and analysis of themselves and of the affections they receive and return.

Men are not so fond of it; their greater activity and more frequent pleasures make them usually impatient when they are forced to much self-examination, and their moral record is rarely clear enough for them to care long to look at it. But women have a passion for moral vivisection, and spend many an hour of torment, turning in and out, and stripping bare the delicate nerves of their own organisations. He wished to check his daughter on the threshold of this laboratory of the imaginations and affections.

The great advantage of a great position is that it leaves little time for such dangerous meditations. Society may not be very elevating or very ennobling, but its demands and its diversions, even when they become tedious, fill the mind and leave small space for self-contemplation. In many ways it is an evil, and it is

unfavourable to the growth of great thoughts; but it is also an aid to happiness, or to such near likeness to happiness as most human lives attain, and John Vernon was unselfishly glad that the world would, if perforce, surround his child so completely. Love can make its own world in a solitude *à deux*, but marriage cannot. He knew that.

Why must the two be divorced? Gladys would have asked him wistfully.

He would have answered her, or probably he would have been too merciful to answer her, that love and certainty can never dwell long together; and the foe that every woman has to dread most utterly is habit—habit which makes the nostrils insensible to the perfume of the rose, and the ears unconscious of the melody of the fountain.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

"You are twenty-one years of age to-morrow, are you not?" said Aubrey to his cousin's wife one autumn day on the terrace of Ladysrood.

"Yes; it seems very old."

She sighed as she spoke. Aubrey laughed, then he sighed too.

"It is very sad if you can feel it to be so," he said seriously.

"I do. I feel quite old. I suppose a woman who is not"—she was about to say "not happy," but checked herself and said instead, "who has lost her children can never feel young."

"Not young at twenty! My dear Gladys, you must be jesting, though it is a very sad jest."

"Oh no. I am not jesting indeed," she replied.

Aubrey looked at her with curiosity and tenderness. "Happiness is a matter of temperament," he said vaguely.

"I suppose so."

"Who should feel young if you do not? So young in years as you are, with perfect bodily health, and all wishes of your heart satisfied except one, which no doubt will be satisfied ere long?"

She did not answer.

She was thinking how surely on the morrow she

would find some superb jewel which she did not want lying on her table as a birthday gift from her lord; and how equally surely when she should meet him later in the morning there would be the indifference in his caress and the conventionality in his congratulation, which may be concealed as completely and as perfectly as kindness and courtesy can conceal them, but which yet show through these as plainly as the gilded copper shows in a little while through the thin gold. How much more feeling would there be in Aubrey's brief warm greeting, or the little Latin poem which her father would be sure to send up to her at morning, penned on parchment in the style of the Latin booklets, rolled on the *umbilicus* with carved ivory ends, and made as completely like such a little messenger of the Cæsars' times as scholarship and love could make it!

What a difference! Oh, what a difference! though the little booklet would only have cost a few hours' labour, and the great jewel two or three thousand guineas!

"Do you think anybody's wishes are ever granted?" she said now.

Aubrey hesitated to reply.

"Yes; I think they are. Very often we do not like them when we get them, but that is not the fault of fate who has humoured us with our selected toys."

"Have you had your wishes?"

"No; for I always wished before everything for a strictly private life, wholly beyond all possibility of comment or interference from the world. As it is I have the felicity of being one of those people who cannot move a step without reporters being after them,

which to me so absolutely poisons all existence that I could willingly change places with any one of my hinds at Balfrons."

"Publicity is the twin of Demos," said Guilderoy, hearing the last words as he approached them. "Between them they will make life altogether insupportable to the man of talent of the future. No one will do anything even in the very least excellent or original, because of the penalty of the public pillory which will await it."

"That I believe," said Aubrey. "But it is, I suppose, only the market-place of Athens or Syracuse over again, with ostracism or petalism."

"There were at least unknown worlds to which to migrate to then," said Guilderoy. "You were, I believe, trying to teach Gladys more enjoyment of such a world as we have. I wish you could succeed. Who is it has said that beauty smileless is as a fair landscape without light?"

She had walked a little way from them in the autumn sunshine.

"She has had a great sorrow," said Aubrey. "The sort of sorrow a woman feels acutely though we do not."

"That I quite understand," said his cousin with some ennui. "But all that kind of feeling passes with time; she is very young; she might be gayer and happier if she chose, very naturally I think and with great advantage. The world would like her better. It does not like serious women."

"Is she so very serious?"

"Can you doubt it? She takes everything seriously:



society, duty, pleasure, fortune, even myself, whom no woman ever took seriously without regretting it!"

He laughed as he spoke, but Aubrey smiled more sadly.

"She stands in a serious relation to you."

"Unfortunately."

The word escaped him without thought. She returned nearer to them at that moment, the pale autumn sunshine shining on her uncovered head, and her slender white throat disclosed by a high lace collar, like those in Marie Antoinette's portraits, opening in front with a knot of gardenias closing it on her breast.

She looked older than her years. It seemed to her as if she had lived half a century since she had left Christslea on the day of her marriage, now nearly four years before, when her father had walked through the golden gorse, wishing that it might be a symbol of her future life.

She was famous as one of the patrician beauties of England.

For the world she had just that mixture of success and of failure which made Guilderoy at once gratified and irritated.

Her great beauty could not be contested; the "grand manner" which had come to her instinctively was perfect in its high breeding and comeliness. Society followed, imitated, and crowned her. But she was not liked; men thought her cold, women considered her rude; every one who knew her was jealous of her or offended by her in some way or another. The world, like her husband, did not find her "facile," and in the frivolities and crazy caprices of the society of

the close of this century she was alienated and stood aloof. She had been made a leader of fashion without being even aware that she was so. A colour or a flower, a mode or a place, which she selected became at once celebrated by her choice of it. There is great caprice in all forms of fame, and in none more so than in the fame which society awards to one of its members.

Society had never found any one so profoundly ignorant of fashion as she was when she first appeared in it; and it had seen no one so little penetrated by its temper and its homage as she still was; out of the very spirit of contradiction it made her one of its sovereigns, though the sceptre it offered seemed to her not of as much worth as any stalk of a bulrush growing by the mere of Ladysrood.

When a woman is happy she can be elastic and sympathetic even to what she dislikes; happiness gives suppleness, softness, and indeed force to the character as sunshine ripens and mellows fruit.

But she was not happy; she loved her husband passionately, and she had from the earliest days of their union been conscious that he was impatient and weary of her. She could not console herself with small things as women usually can do. She cared scarcely at all for her position, her influence, the pleasures of the world, or the extravagance of her toilettes; and the flatteries she received produced no more impression on her than the beating of the rain against her carriage panels as she went to Court.

She had given birth to two male children, but one had died before birth and the other a few months afterwards. It was supposed by those who knew her

that her want of interest in all which went on around her was due to this disappointment; but it was not that only which made life void of satisfaction to her. The greatest suffering of her life arose from the fact that her fine and penetrating intelligence could not let her be blind to the discovery that whatever sensual or sentimental desire had hurried Guilderoy into his marriage, she was now absolutely nothing in his existence; nay, was even perhaps something which perpetually annoyed and irritated him by the mere sense that she was there, for ever, in his existence.

Outwardly, however, all was still well.

"Your melancholy predictions are happily falsified, you see," he said to John Vernon one day, who hesitated a moment before he replied.

"I am sincerely glad to hear it."

"Your tone is sombre and incredulous, and I fear you doubt it still?"

"I am afraid that of marriage, as of men, one is forced to say, 'Call it not happy till its end is seen.'"

"What, after all, is happiness? George Sand has best defined it, '*C'est un éclair qui traverse les brumes monotones de la vie.*'"

"That is surely rather descriptive of ecstasy? The ecstasy which, in the nature of things, must have the lightning's brief duration as it has its brilliancy. Happiness, I have always held, is rather a matter of our own individual temperament than of circumstances or of the passions."

"A philosopher's view; true, no doubt, of philosophers, hardly of mankind in general, of womankind certainly not true."

"No, women are the creatures of the emotions; a cold word, a letter a day late, a sigh which they overhear and think is not for them, suffices to make them wretched. I hope you do not find Gladys over-sensitive? I could hardly myself tell whether she were or not. She was a child, and there was nothing to rouse her feelings unless it were a stray dog or a fisherman's boat that foundered."

"No, I do not think she is impressionable," replied Guilderoy. "She is certainly not impassioned."

"Ah!" Vernon looked at him with a little sigh. "What did I tell you? She was years too young."

"One is glad of a certain coldness in one's wife. Coldness is not the word I ought to use, however; there is an absence of passion in her; I do not regret it; it is a great shield in the world."

"You would regret it if you loved her," thought Vernon. "Or rather if you had really loved her you would have taken pains to conjure it away. I daresay you alarmed her at first with the violence of your ardours, and then you chilled her with the carelessness of your tepid affections, and between the two the soul in her is scared and shuts itself up like an oyster, closing its shell on its pearl."

He was not more satisfied than he had been before their marriage.

It seemed to him that the acquiescent contentment of Guilderoy might very easily drift on into mere indifference, and if the heart of Gladys were now still asleep it would assuredly awake some day.

"How fatal is marriage!" he thought. "A man sees a woman, a woman a man, with no knowledge, no

experience of each other; very often without even any affinity, they enter into the closest of all human relations, and undertake to pass their lives together. It is the habit of its apologists to say that it works well, idiotic though it looks. It does not work well. It hurries men and women blindly into unions which often become absolutely hateful to them, stifling to their development and intolerably irritating to their inclinations. It flies in the face of all the laws of sex. It is a figment of the social code, irrational, unreal, and setting up a gigantic lie as the scaffolding which supports society. Nominally monogamous, all cultured society is polygamous; sometimes even polyandrous. Why is the fact not recognised and frankly admitted? Why do we adhere to the fiction of a fidelity which is neither in nature nor in feeling possible to man? Because property lays its foundations most easily by means of marriage, therefore the individual is sacrificed to property. I confess that it makes one almost side with the Socialists."

"It is not very long since you came here on the wings of a headlong and unconsidered desire," he said aloud. "You have had your desire; can you honestly declare that you are any the happier for it?"

Guilderoy was embarrassed. He was naturally sincere.

"If I be not," he said with effort, "the fault is certainly my own, and no one else's."

He knew that he infinitely regretted his marriage, but he could not say so to John Vernon.

He regretted it for five hundred reasons which were for ever rising up in his memory. He regretted it be-

cause he was impatient of its obligations, and he received none of the compensation which he had anticipated. His wife was lovely, admired, and perfect in her manner in the world; but he did not believe that she had any single opinion or feeling in common with him. She gave him the constant impression that she disapproved of all he said and all he did; she was neither pliant nor facile; she obeyed all his wishes invariably, but there was something about her passive obedience which irritated him more than any refusal could have done. Physically, he had tired of her as absolutely as though she had had neither youth nor loveliness, and, mentally, he had early concluded that her nature and character were wholly unsuited to his own.

After all, it was the common doom he thought; no marriages were happy, the utmost that the best of them became was a mutual agreement to make the best of a mistake. And little by little, every day and every hour, she became less and less in his thoughts, of less importance in his projects and wishes, of less influence on his temper and temperament, of less prominence in his life and his feelings. On the whole it had been a failure, and he knew it, but he was always desirous that his society and his friends should be as much blinded to the fact as was possible. He was careful of every observance and consideration for her before the world; for to think that the world ever talked of their union as infelicitous would have been still more intolerable to him than the infelicity itself.

And yet he was aware that he had a great deal to be proud of in the woman who bore his name, and a

great deal to be grateful for in that pride and delicacy in her character which would, he was sure, prevent her from ever jeopardizing his honour or her own.

“*On a les défauts de ses qualités,*” he thought often. “If she had been more impressionable and more facile to me, she would have been so to others as well as to myself.”

A man’s error. One of the many errors which are very common to men, and stand for ever between them and their true comprehension of women.

Sometimes, when he was in a contented mood, he told himself that it was as well as he could have hoped; she was much handsomer than most; high-bred in manner and feeling; and, if too silent, her silence at least preserved her from the *caquetages* and imprudences which compromise socially so many women. If she spoke little, she at least spoke well when she did speak. She looked admirably effective in any one of his houses; whether at Ladysrood, or in London, Paris, or Venice. She had that look as of an old portrait, a Reynolds, a Gainsborough, a Mignard, or a Giorgione, which makes a woman accord with old and picturesque and stately residences.

On the whole it might have been worse, he often told himself; but then this resignation is not the language of happiness.

“You always saw the Princess in Perdita,” said Hilda Sunbury once to her cousin Aubrey; and he answered, “Yes; it was very easy to see that. I think the heart is always Perdita’s, always sighing a little for the

shepherd's hut, and the pressed curds, and the oaten cake."

"What a simpleton if she is!" remarked Lady Sunbury, who had no patience with shepherds or for those who sighed for them. "Because she has not even the very smallest of stones in her shoe, she goes miles out of her way to pick up one to put in it!"

"What pebble does she pick up?" asked Aubrey.

"How should I know?" said Lady Sunbury. "She picks up ever so many, I believe. The most impossible thing of all is that she is sentimentally in love with Evelyn. As if there could be ever anything surer to drive him headlong away from her! He has been a man of many, many caprices, but nothing would ever be so appalling to him as to be loved with anything approaching a *grande passion*. He cannot endure worry; he abhors the expression of anything like strong emotion. He is amiability itself as long as you do not fatigue him, or bore him; but the moment you do either he puts a cross against your name and avoids you. If she does not understand that, he will avoid her. Avoid her permanently! He was never in love with her. His fancy was captivated and his obstinacy was charmed by the idea of marrying what he admired and I disliked. That was all. He thought her lovely and he wished for her; her loveliness has lasted, but his wishes have not lasted with it."

"Who was it said that in a year it is just the same to you whether your wife is Venus or a Hottentot?" said Aubrey. "I do not go quite so far as that, but I am certain that Venus, when she can always be had,



does cease to seem beautiful to her possessor. I once asked an Austrian abbot if he could ever weary of the view before his windows over the Danube; it was so beautiful; and the abbot said to me, 'Dear Sir, I have looked at that view so long that it seems marvellous to me you can find any beauty in it at all!' That is human nature, in a monastery and out of it."

Lady Sunbury was a woman who had no illusions, and she was extremely angry with people who were silly enough to nourish them. They seemed to her the most useless things in the world; exorbitant in their demands, baseless in their formation, and foredoomed before their birth to disappointment. Material advantages were, after all, what really mattered, she thought; ease, affluence, and influence the only real enjoyment of existence; and she—whose whole life for twenty years had been made painful and irritating to her by financial difficulties, by conjugal quarrels, by standing the helpless witness of extravagance and folly, repeated from father to son, and all the incessant mortifications which await the contrast of a great position with a narrow fortune—felt no patience with what appeared to her the mere sentimental childish imaginary sorrows of her young sister-in-law: they seemed to her like weeping for the moon.

"I believe you encourage her in her delusions," she added.

"I do not see her enough to encourage anything, good or bad," said Aubrey.

It was not strictly true. Whenever his cousin was in England he saw his cousin's wife, and found time to do so even when his crowded and harassed life could

ill afford the few spare hours in it to any mere personal interest. She had interested him on the first day that he had called on her in the Watteau cabinet amongst the roses, and had found her tired of the weight of her jewels and of the darkness and noise of the great capital.

Many times during the London season he put aside weighty labours to find moments for her boudoir, and when he had no day for anyone else he would always take one, amidst the stress of political excitement, to pass a few hours at Ladysrood whenever his cousin was there. He was a man of strong feeling which slumbered underneath the prosaic cares of a political career. His imagination was still alive; and he had a vague consciousness that he was watching the opening scenes of a story which might possibly turn some day to tragedy, whenever he found himself associated at any of the great gatherings of Ladysrood, or listened to any expression of divergent opinion between Guilderoy and his wife.

"She might be perfectly happy from one year to another," continued Lady Sunbury irritably. "Has she no idea of all that she owes to Providence for having given her a companion who is good-tempered and a purse which is full? Does she expect a Prince Charming like my brother to sit always at her feet? Does she think that because she has married him all other women cease to exist for him? Does she expect to make a homing pigeon of a migratory nightingale? She must be a fool, absolutely a fool!"

"No, she is not that; not that by any means," said Aubrey. "She is only a woman—very much in love,

very ignorant of life, and totally unable to understand the caprices and vagaries of the male temperament."

"Well, if that goes on she will be a fool," said Hilda Sunbury. "You will admit so much? How can she live in the world day and night as she does and not learn something?"

"Perhaps she will learn more than he will like, some day."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. I do not mean anything especial; but I think as a general rule women who have two grains of sense do not continue jealous of a man who is indifferent to them, but rather turn the tables and give him cause for jealousy."

"Is that the advice you will give her?"

"I shall not give it her certainly, but you may be sure a great many men will."

"And do you think she will take it?"

"I should say that would entirely depend on her mood of the moment."

"On her mood: not on her principles?"

"My dear Hilda—*point de phrases!*—that sense of principle resists in a woman all temptation from without only just as long as it is not tempted from within. So long as she is still in love with Evelyn he will be safe, unless in a moment of pique she revenges herself in the endeavour to make him feel; but the instant she ceases to care—— Well, I do not suppose that the Guilderoys scutcheon will then be the religiously sacred thing to her which it appears to you. I have great belief in the affections of women, but I have no belief in what is termed their virtue. I mean that they

are to be controlled through the one, not through the other. Moralists say that a soul should resist passion. They might as well say that a house should resist an earthquake."

"What a doctrine!" exclaimed Lady Sunbury, shocked.

Aubrey looked at her with a smile. "Oh, there are souls which are passionless, no doubt, as there are houses which are not built over a volcanic current," he said, and thought to himself:

"What should you know—you thoroughly excellent and most irritating of Englishwomen? What should you know? Your whole soul has been centered in externals, in ceremonials, in social dignities, in social duties, bound in the buckram of routine, and stiff with the starch of position? What should you know of all the great passions which make life bloom like a Sicilian pasture in flower in May, only often to lay it waste under lava, as Etna pours fire and stones over the asphodels and the irises?"

But he did not say so; she would have thought him mad; and she, like the world, knew nothing of the tragedy in his own life which made him so infinitely pitiful to all woes of the passion and emotions; she, like the world, thought him a man without a grain of romance in his nature.

Aubrey perceived, what his cousin did not take the trouble to see, that Gladys was not happy: was depressed by an affection—very strong on her part once, very slight on her husband's—and was restrained at once by pride or by shyness from ever expressing anything which she felt.

She was not demonstrative by nature, and if she had been so she would have hesitated to risk wearying Guilderoy by the expression of what she felt was indifferent to him. The demonstrations of his passion had not lasted long; they had left her with remembrance of a fervour and a phrenzy which she could never forget, and which made the mere mechanical caresses of habit wholly intolerable to her. If she had never been loved in this way she might have lived contentedly without it; but the intoxication of those first weeks in Venice had taught her all that love could be. To become after then merely the mistress of his house, merely the rarely remembered object of conventional embraces, was to her an unendurable torture. She appeared to him cold when her whole senses and emotions were writhing under the carelessness and indifference of his.

"He only recollects my existence now and then because he wishes for children," she felt bitterly. He was always courteous, kind, and gentle; but as every month passed away she felt more and more that he had never really cared for her. He had married her out of caprice, passing admiration, fancy for what was new and strange to him, and the sense that he must some day marry or see his title and estates pass to persons whom he detested. Her clear and quick comprehension taught her this very soon, and occasional phrases which she overheard from the women most intimate with him confirmed her knowledge. She felt that those who liked her pitied her, whilst those who liked him, the far larger number, regarded her with

something more disdainful than pity. The sense of that gave her a calmness quite foreign to her nature, and a strength of self-repression injurious at her years.

She had had everything to learn of the world into which she was launched; but she soon became acquainted with its intricacies, its meanings *à demi-mot*, its profound heartlessness and unscrupulousness veiled by such polished externals. She had at first failed to comprehend many things which passed around her, but little by little she had learned to attach their full meaning to them, and thus she arrived in the third year of her married life to a perception that the affections which Guilderoy did not give to her he took elsewhere. He did not, indeed, ever offend her by notorious or openly-displayed attachments; but she knew that the society of almost any other woman was more agreeable to him than her own. She saw that he was sought, flattered, admired, tempted, on all sides; and she saw that he did not resist, or try to resist, the temptation. Whether they were in London or Paris, in Italian cities or German watering places, or at their own country place, or the country places of their friends, she saw that any woman, seen for the first time and possessing beauty or charm enough to attract him, became for the time being infinitely more the mistress of his thoughts and feelings than she had ever had power to be.

"I wish you would endeavour to be amusing," he said, more than once to her. "I assure you in these days Helen or Briseis herself would have no chance in the world if she were not amusing."

"And were I amusing, I should have no power to amuse you," she thought, though she did not say it. She was not amusing, because she was not amused. She was not amused because she was not happy. In happiness one enjoys trifles like a child, and the great world only seems to us a brilliant *décor de scène* set out on purpose to illustrate and illuminate our own romance, which is being played on its stage. But in the depression of repressed affections or disappointed illusions, the best of its pageantry leaves us depressed and displeased. The world thought Lady Guilderoy stupid, and when it was disturbed in this opinion by some unexpected allusion or some curt incisive phrase which showed in her both the habits of study and the powers of sarcasm, it disliked her still more than when it had believed that her lovely mouth could only drop monosyllables.

## CHAPTER XX.

THE only person, besides her father, who saw her wholly at her best, and quite as she was, was Aubrey. In great receptions, in large house parties, in all the crowd and movement of fashionable life, she was always glad to see Aubrey come to her side, and to feel the shield of his kindly friendship between her and the impertinences of fine ladies and the embarrassing homage of men, who, seeing that she was neglected,

made sure that she could be consoled. He did much for her that Guilderoy had never dreamed of doing, and would not have had patience to do if he had. He gave her many indications of all that she needed to know in the bewildering mazes of fashion and precedence. He got for her the good will of many persons of power and influence. He explained to her many things which astonished and troubled her, and he made her London receptions successful and distinguished. The world obeyed any hint from him eagerly, and all his social power, which was vast, he put out on behalf of his cousin's wife.

"Nothing would enrage and estrange Evelyn so greatly as to find her a social failure," he thought very often, "and yet he will not take the trouble to stretch out his little finger to prevent her being one."

And what his cousin failed to do, Aubrey did.

"It is a little like Achilles spinning for me to interfere in these things," he said with a smile, as he corrected her invitation list, explained to her questions of precedence, and told her why one duchess was a great sovereign revered by all society, and another duchess was a mere dowdy whose word nobody attended to or asked. All these things were trifles which were wholly insignificant in his sight, occupied as he was with the great cares of public life; but from his birth and position he was familiar with them; he knew their power to make or mar a woman's entry into the great world, and he had power to control all their mysterious influences; and all that it was necessary for her to know and avoid, she learned from him.



"Evelyn should do all this for you," he said to her once. But his cousin did not, and never would have done, so Aubrey did it for him.

He knew that Guilderoy would never pardon a woman who bore his name if she did not attain eminence in society. Guilderoy imagined that he attached no value to social opinion, and weighed nothing in its scales. But he deceived himself in that as in many another estimate of his feelings, and unless the purest silver had possessed the hall mark he would never have rated it as silver.

"You are very kind to Gladys," he said to his cousin once or twice, but he was never aware of all that he owed to Aubrey; and that if his wife received princes and princesses with a perfect manner, if she filled her houses with the best and only the best people, if she never made an error in the date of a title, or a mistake in the smaller intricacies of etiquette and precedence, it was due entirely to the man who sometimes, for the first time in his life, was late at a Cabinet Council, or tardy in speaking before a division, because he had been giving lessons in social policy to John Vernon's daughter.

"These are all very little things, both you and I consider," said Aubrey to her. "Yes, they are indeed the absurdest of trifles, and it is perhaps wonderful that a society on the brink of disintegration, as English society is, should still make so much of them. But it is just the knowledge of them, or the ignorance of them, which marks a woman of the world from a parvenue. Guilderoy wishes you to be a woman of the

world, so omit nothing which is necessary to the education of the world. Besides, I confess that social etiquette has a certain value, if only in the maintenance of some standard for manners; I wish in some things that we had more of it; I wish it were not possible for an American adventuress to entertain the Prince of Wales, or for an English brewer to be hoisted into the House of Lords because he has made money by brewing, and been useful in elections. I know this latter possibility has been called the strength of England; but it has, on the contrary, been and is her very greatest weakness. For it has made social life a hotbed for aspiring toadyism, has made political life a manure heap for the propagation of mushroom nobility, and has enabled a minister to force measures on the country which the country disapproves, because he can bribe his supporters by the whispered promise of peerages. If new peers must be made, it would be better to call up all the Victoria Cross men to the Upper House than to make nobility ridiculous by conferring it on tradesmen. The Victoria Cross men would at least allow of some sort of analogy to the old reasons for knighthood."

Gladys always listened and followed him with sincere interest when he spoke of these things. Her father had been used to converse with her at times on serious and public matters, and all the problems of government and history possessed much more interest for her than the fashionable frivolities of the hour.

"It will be time to think of politics twenty years hence," said Guilderoy to her, but she thought of them

already, and often went to the Speaker's gallery to hear Aubrey.

He spoke well; not with any great brilliancy of rhetoric, but with admirable lucidity and logic, great force of persuasion, great power of invective held in calm reserve, and that tone of perfect courtesy and scholarship which have been, until the last dozen years, the distinguishing glory of the House of Commons.

"Why do *you* never speak?" she asked once of Guilderoy, who answered impatiently:

"It is of no use to speak in the Lords. Besides, I have never spoken. If I were to rise now they would think I had gone mad. It is of no kind of use to enter political life unless one has been trained by having passed one's early years in the Commons. I could never have had that parliamentary education. I succeeded my father when I was a child of five years old."

"But you have great talents, they all say? My father says so, too!"

"I am not sure that I have any. The world and your father are too complimentary to me. But I have at all events the common sense not to spoil my whole life by efforts for which I am wholly unfitted, and which would be assuredly wholly unprofitable."

"Aubrey's are not unprofitable?"

"I should not venture to say they were, but I am quite sure he is not such a blind optimist as to be satisfied with their results. Parliamentary government is the best machine that was ever constructed for grinding down superiority into mediocrity; that is why it is so immensely popular with the middle classes."

"But if you believe in an oligarchy, you might at least support that if you were conspicuous in public life?"

"I never said I believed in it, my dear. All I am entirely convinced of is that the power of no man, whether Aubrey or another, will check permanently the gradual breaking up of England, which is being brought about by the inevitable decadence into which all nations fall."

"I do not like to think it."

"No one likes it; but our liking or our disliking will not alter the philosophy of history."

"But do you not feel that our own lives lead to it? Do you not see that society is so foolish, so extravagant, so selfish, so crowded, that it must make those outside of it despise it even while they envy it? You have said yourself that there is neither elegance nor dignity in it, only an immense expenditure, and a feverish hurry. You have said yourself that instead of Mæcenas we have a nobility which sends its libraries and its picture galleries to the auction-room; which, rather than give up its racing and betting, its foreign baths and its London excesses, will see its old houses stripped, or its woods felled, or its collections bought by the Jews. I have heard you say that, or similar things, a thousand times."

"Certainly, my dear; and does any Cuypp out of Ladysrood, any Gainsborough out of this house, go to Christie's through me? I have never cut a stick of timber which it was not absolutely needful to cut for the health and the growth of the woods themselves. When I have been pressed for money, which has happened, though

my income is large, I have never sold my family Holbeins nor my ancestral oaks. I have a very strong sense that *noblesse oblige*, though I have not, I admit, the virtues of my cousin Aubrey."

He spoke with some irritation, and for the first time a vague sense of annoyance, at the opinion she had of Aubrey, stirred in him.

"He and I," he continued, "have always been the industrious and the idle apprentices in the eyes of our families. He early chose Athene and I Venus. But though I grant he has the monopoly of the virtues, yet I have an ounce of conscience left I assure you, and all that I have inherited will pass out of my hands as it came into them, intact to your children."

She resigned the argument; she could not press on him the fact that his life was utterly self-indulgent, however free it might be from the avarice or the indignity which allowed others to send their household goods to the market.

"Who has filled your head with these fancies of utility?" he said, irritably. "Your father or my cousin? What a singular thing it is that when nine hundred and ninety-nine women out of a thousand only ask to enjoy themselves, I should have married the one in a thousand who knows nothing of enjoyment!"

And he left her with some impatience. She could neither persuade nor allure him, because she possessed no influence upon him.

"She will be all her life that most depressing thing, a conscientious woman!" he thought with a smile and a sigh as he drove to his favourite club. "If she had

married Aubrey she would have been a million times happier, and I——”

What would he have done? Would he have remained at the feet of the only woman whom he had ever loved with any love approaching a strong passion? He was not sure; but what we might have done almost always looks to us so much fairer than what we have done.

He did full justice to his wife's mind and character; he even in theory admired them, but in actual fact he was only bored by them. She had not known how to interest and divert him; she was transparently truthful, full of high ideals and high thoughts, and possessed with the terrible earnestness of youth; but she only wearied him, and a woman far her inferior, morally and mentally, would have had far more power to move him when she wished if she had only had more pliability and more gaiety of temperament. He required to be amused as a petulant and spoilt child requires it. There were always countless women ready to do it; he went to them and left Aubrey to bring blue books and explain international law to his wife.

“It is his *métier!*” he said with some contempt. He did not perceive, because he did not study her enough to see it, that what prevented her from having such enjoyment of life as would have been in accordance with her nature and her age was the sense, perpetually weighing on her, that he regretted his hasty marriage.

She felt that she was a burden on him; and though she never said it, its consciousness was ever present with her.

The existence of incessant change which she perpetually led gave her rather sadness and bewilderment

than pleasure. The few months they remained in the London house, the few weeks spent at Ladysrood, the changes from Paris to Venice, to Cannes, to Aix, to Baden, according to the season of the year and the moods of fashion, gave her a sense of homelessness and restlessness which were not suited to her temperament. Life did not seem to her spent aright in this mere succession of display and distraction, this indolent and self-indulgent pursuit of the appetites and senses. She was afraid of seeming "odd" in her world; for he told her that people were so soon considered so, and always detested as a consequence. She did her best to endeavour to seem amused at this perpetual carnival; but she could not bring herself to feel so. Her early education had left too indelible a stamp of simplicity and gravity upon her for her to easily adopt the tone of those around her. Sometimes Guilderoy saw, or thought he saw, a look of disdain for his pursuits and pastimes come upon her features, and it angered him extremely. He thought it a censure of himself.

"My sister's frown was quite enough in the family," he said once petulantly.

"Did I frown?" said Gladys, very sorrowfully. "I did not know it. Indeed I am very sorry."

"You frown very often," he said angrily. "Perhaps you do not know it. It is an ugly habit, and makes people think you a prude."

"I see a great deal in society that I do not like," she said, a little coldly.

"And pray, my dear, did it never occur to you that neither age nor experience have as yet qualified you to act as duenna to a naughty world?"

She coloured at the ridicule in his accent.

"About some things I am sure I am right," she said in a low tone, which sounded to him like obstinacy. "One wants no duenna to know that there are some things which are—which offend one—one feels them."

"*You* feel them because your heart is always behind your beehives and sweetbriar at Christslea, and you think every one should talk like your father, with equal parts of St. Augustine and Horace. You are a country mouse at heart, and are always sighing for the hayricks. How I do wish you were not! It makes the women detest you and laugh at you; and it does not suit your style at all. You look a great lady, not a Phyllis or Amaryllis."

"They may laugh if they please," she said, with the look on her face with which she had once said that the Cherriton lads might burn the hut down if they pleased.

"But that is just what they must not do," said Guilderoy, considerably irritated. "Nothing offends or annoys me more; nothing is so odious as the ridicule by women of a woman. She never recovers it. It is much less injurious to her to be calumniated than to be laughed at. The greatest beauty cannot stand it."

"It is wholly indifferent to me!"

"But it is not to me," said Guilderoy. "*Le ridicule tue*. It kills grace, it kills charm, it kills popularity. It would afflict me immeasurably if for want of a little flexibility you were considered a precisian in the world. It is Hilda's style, I am aware, but it is a most uncomfortable style, most depressing in its effect upon others, and not at all the style of our day."

"*Une société gangrenée!* Oh, we know all that; it



has been said admirably by Balzac, and more or less since by all his imitators," continued Guilderoy, impatiently. "It is really not necessary, my love, that you should either preach or philosophise about it. There are always numbers of writers and wits who make their livelihood by repeating all that kind of thing as well as it can be said; and I am myself convinced that no amount of condemnation will ever alter matters by a hand's breadth—not even condemnation so weighty and so terrible as yours!"

She coloured, mortified by the words and by their tone. She felt that in his eyes she was always the same country child who had first opened the little wicket for him under the boughs at Christslea. She had grown a century older in her own feelings; she was greatly changed in the eyes of all others; but in his sight she was always the same young and unworldly rustic, who had known no society beyond that of the fisherfolk on the shore and the wild creatures of the moorlands and orchards.

He had no patience to discuss her opinions; he could not see why she should have any. This disdainful relegation of her to an utterly inferior place in intelligence, in its strong contrast with the reverential sympathy of Aubrey, gave her a passionate sense of offence, which was too deep to be easily expressed.

"He thinks me a fool," she felt bitterly; and she knew that she was not one, that she could have met him on equal ground if he had deigned to so encounter her.

She was silent.

"English society," he continued, "has undergone

the most radical revolution in its tone and temper as well as in its politics; it has put seven-leagued boots on in the ways of demoralisation as well as democracy. It is much more than fast, it is constantly outrageous. We have always been a very profligate nation, though we have professed great chastity; and in this generation the impudent people are uppermost, and they have moulded a society to their liking, and every one who is not of it is nowhere."

"Do you desire that I should be of it?"

"Of course not, my dear child. Why will you suggest absurdities? You do not wait to hear my conclusion. I was about to say that modern society, being no longer high-bred, but only 'smart,' no longer distinguished, but only rich, as immoral as it can possibly be, and having even ceased to be able to tell a gentlewoman from a *cabotine* when it sees one, good manners are altogether thrown away upon it, and it only laughs at them."

"Its laughter must be less degrading than its praise!"

"That is the sort of thing which you are always saying and for which they detest you. I am not estimating its praise. I am wholly indifferent to it. But I assure you that your scornful dignity and your delicate susceptibilities are as out of place in it as the silver ewer that the royal fugitives carried with them on the road to Varennes."

"Silver vessels seemed natural to them, I suppose."

"Yes; and so the silver of seriousness and high-breeding are natural to you. But it is the people with the pitchforks and the false assignats that are now block-

ing the roads of society everywhere, and though you cannot help being royal, you may as well smile when you can."

He could not say to her what he really wished to convey, that her lack of animation and interest made women laugh at her, and laugh at him because they believed her jealous of his attentions to them; and the unconscious disapprobation often spoken in her eyes of the society which most amused him was a constant theme of raillery against him with his female friends.

Material sorrows every one can understand, though even these every one does not stay to pity; but the sorrows of the spirit, when combined with material prosperity, hardly any one has patience to contemplate. Cold, hunger, and ill-health, all these wants and pains physical, are easily comprehended even by the unsympathetic; but the cold of the soul which is solitary, the hunger of the heart which vaguely misses and vaguely desires what it has never yet found, the ill-health of the spirit which is weary and yet restless, which sits at the banquets of the world without appetite, and turns away from all which delights others, cloyed and yet empty, this no one will ever pity; the multitude only calls it in a man cynicism, and in a woman ennui. And yet how far it is from being either one or the other!

She was too young to know the charm of toleration, the wisdom of indifference, the force of an influence which is never urged but merely suggested. Her character had been constructed by her father's teachings on a few broad lines; the lines on which were built the characters of a simpler, graver, calmer day than ours,

when women stayed at home whether in palace or in cabin. It had strength, truth, candour, honour, purity; but, like many such characters, it lacked pliancy, sympathy, and comprehensiveness. It adhered to its own few firm rules, and did not allow for, because it did not in any measure perceive, the caprices, the necessities, and the weaknesses of others.

There is a fatal law which philosophers might possibly trace out to some law of compensation, which usually makes the woman of perfect purity and candour incapable of that charm of quickly comprehending and infinitely pardoning which makes a woman most sweet and most beloved.

## CHAPTER XXI.

AUBREY'S sister, the Duchess of Longleat, was one of those who make *la pluie et le beau temps* in the great world for those she disapproved or favoured. She had conceived at first a violent dislike to Gladys because "no one knew her"—darkest of all social crimes! But Aubrey took infinite pains to reconcile her, and to secure her kindness and support to Guilderoys wife.

"Why should you care whether she is admired or detested?" his sister asked him once; and he replied:

"I care because I pity her infinitely; she is married to a man who will never pardon her if she fails to succeed in his world, and who yet will never take the trouble to point out to her the way to succeed."

"It is a dangerous occupation to do it for him," said his sister. "She is extremely handsome."

"Not dangerous to me," said Aubrey with a rather sad smile. "You know I am *bien trempé*."

"To Evelyn to have his wife a mere country nonentity," he continued, "a woman who makes blunders and is quoted in ridicule because she sends in the wrong people together, would be infinitely more intolerable than to have her a Medea or Lady Macbeth. She knows nothing of social matters. How should she? She is a child, and she has always lived in a cottage with a recluse. But some one must teach them to her. Hilda Sunbury ought, but she will not; virtuous woman though she is, she would be delighted at everything which would separate her brother from his wife. Evelyn will not because he is too indolent, and he has more-over no patience with people to whom these things are not a second nature. There only remain yourself or myself. We must undertake her training in these things."

"I really do not see why," said the Duchess. "Evelyn is an unconscionable egotist. He has always been so; he always will be. We are not bound to remedy the omissions of his selfishness."

But she adored her brother, and to please him threw over the new-comer the mighty ægis of her approbation and protection. The world always followed her Grace of Longleat like sheep.

"The Duchess of Longleat thinks her perfect," was a phrase with which those who wished ill to Gladys were easily silenced. Against the opinion of that greatest of great ladies there was no appeal.

Guilderoy meanwhile went on his own way, not

taking any notice of the means by which his wife's social success was secured. He was often absent in Paris, in Italy, at German baths, or in Austrian country houses, and his wife was quickly becoming not of much more serious import to him than the chests of old Stuart and Tudor plate locked up at Ladysrood. He prized the plate certainly, and would have been indignant and humiliated if thieves had broken in and stolen it. But it was scarcely ever in his thoughts. He trusted its safe keeping to that good fortune which had attended him from his birth.

He had, by degrees, glided back into his old habits, his old amusements, his old attentions to women; and he never looked intently or fondly enough at her to become aware of a certain look which was in her eyes when they followed him which might have told him that she was neither a child nor a saint, neither impassive nor forgiving. He only thought her of a cold temperament, and was glad.

She vaguely yet painfully felt that she had been deceived by the grave and tender sentiments which he had expressed so constantly before marriage with her, and which were now never heard of from him. He seemed utterly to have forgotten all the poetic and romantic views with which he had captivated her childish imagination; and she thought that they had been entirely assumed to attract her. She did him wrong. He had been quite sincere in his moods of serious and ardent fancy when he had been first under the charm of Christslea. He had affected nothing; he had been actually, for the time being, the imaginative and serious lover which he had seemed to be. He was

a man wholly surrendered to the influence of the moment, and taking all his colour from it.

Very soon after his union with her, the habitual influences of his life had begun to reassume their force over him; the poetry and earnestness which had never been more than momentary with him had ceded place in turn to the instincts and modes of thought more common to him. He had never been insincere, although he appeared so to her. He had been merely following the whims and emotions of a season; and when she ceased to have any power over him, the kind of feelings which she had temporarily aroused faded with the fading of her charm. His sister had been wholly correct in saying that his fancy for his wife had only been in feeling an *amourette* like many another, and it had no more enduring weight with him. But in all this he was not false, although he seemed to her to be so. He followed his own varying moods, and if she became of but slight account in his existence, it was because he honestly forgot that she ought to be of any.

But all these complications and vacillations of character were too intricate for her to follow; and she only felt a continually growing sense that she had been intentionally deceived by him when he had wooed her with the graceful and chivalrous kind of homage which had won her young heart under the red autumn leaves of the Christslea orchards. The world forever claimed him; and he went to its claims willingly.

He could not live without stimulant, distraction, movement, excitement; they were all drugs indispensable to his existence, and in the fumes of them such

an idyl as had smiled at him for a moment amongst the autumn flowers of Christslea had no chance to retain its spell. He had been quite sincere in it; as sincere as when he had assured her father that he sighed for the nude and childlike soul of a virgin love. He had not conscientiously played a part; because he had believed that the part was his own whilst he had played it. But this was too subtle for her comprehension; she only saw that the man who had wooed her did not exist in the man who had wedded her.

In him as in many another man of intelligence and imagination, the mingled fever and conventionality of modern life had made both imagination and intelligence mere occasional factors in his thoughts and character; frittered away and hurried away by the ever-pressing crowd of baser instincts and more material interests and pleasures.

In all the wishes and fancies for a more poetic existence, and for more innocent affections, which he had expressed to her, and to her father, in the weeks preceding his marriage, he had been his own dupe; and had deluded himself with a mirage of his own creating. The mirage had faded; but the obligations he had taken on himself when under the charm of it, remained behind it.

Now and then, indeed, he felt with a pang that he did not keep his promise to John Vernon in either the spirit or the letter. "*Et puer est, et nudus Amor,*" he had said when sitting under the porch at Christslea; but the divine nudity of the innocent soul had soon seemed to him of little charm, and he had wished it draped and veiled with those arts which heighten what



they hide. He knew, in his own consciousness, that every word which Vernon had predicted had been verified. He had sought those who threw the sulphur on the fading or on the rising flame. Often he sought them in spheres far removed from the knowledge or observation of his wife. But at times the women who beguiled him were amidst those of her own world.

There was a new star risen over London society in the third year of his marriage. It was a lady familiarly called by all her male friends Olive Shiffton: a very pretty woman, with the undulating form and the voluptuous grace of an odalisque, combined with an impudence which was almost heroic, and a success only possible in the senility and sensuality of society at the close of this century. Mrs. Shiffton had come no one very well knew whence. Her husband had a large Australian fortune, and she herself was vaguely said to be "a lawyer's daughter," which, as Lady Sunbury observed, was satisfactory, no doubt, but vague, comprising as it did everything whatever from the Lord Chancellor down to the lowest attorney of Smoke Street. Be she what she would, she was lovely to look at, had caught the eye and amused the ennui of an exalted personage, and had, by audacity, cringing, and cleverness, placed herself in the highest rank of society. Some great ladies still did not know her, indeed, but they were the exception. Mrs. Percy Shiffton was really seen "everywhere."

She laid siege to Guilderoy, and succeeded in beguiling him. She amused him infinitely, quite as much by what she was not as by what she was. Her constant endeavour to persuade herself and everybody that she

had been born in the purples was a perpetual comedy to him; whilst the great rarity of her peculiar loveliness, which was that of a Créole rather than of an Englishwoman, had a potent seduction for his senses.

"Do not even think of that odious woman; I do not even know her," said the Duchess of Longleat to Gladys; but Gladys could not but see the power possessed and exercised by this person whom she met at every turn and in every house except at that of Her Grace of Longleat, at Balfrons, and at Illington. The very exclusion of the lady from the houses of his relatives served to suggest to her the terms of intimacy existing between Guilderoy and Olive Shiffon.

"It is only his way; he is always flirting like that; it means nothing," whispered the Duchess to her once at a great ball at Grosvenor House, where Guilderoy, half amused, half bored, was sitting out four dances under the shadow of tropical plants by the side of Olive Shiffon.

"Why do you not flirt too, you goose? That would bring him to his senses," thought the Duchess. But she had too much of the good nature of the Balfrons blood to make the suggestion, and she had great respect for the self-control with which a woman so young as Gladys succeeded in restraining all evidence of suspicion or indignation.

"It is not Olive Shiffon that she need care about," said Lady Sunbury to her. "He will play with her a season—half a season—nothing more. There are greater dangers than that, if she only could understand them."

"What do you mean?" asked the Duchess.

"I mean that all these caprices do not really matter.

What does matter is the only woman he has ever really loved, or, to my belief, will ever really love."

"Beatrice Sorla?" asked the Duchess. "But I thought that was all broken off long ago?"

"My dear Ermyntude," replied Lady Sunbury, "there are plants which only grow the stronger for being broken off; any gardener will tell you that. He was in Italy this spring, and you know Sorla is dead."

"Certainly he was in Italy, and certainly Sorla is dead; but it does not follow——"

"How can you say so? Oh! if there were nothing more truly dangerous than the Olive Shifftons of society we should not all suffer as we do."

"Well, do not suggest it to Gladys. Here, if anywhere, ignorance is bliss."

"I am not a mischief-maker," replied Lady Sunbury with hauteur and dignity.

"I am afraid you are, sometimes," thought Ermyntude Longleat; and she communicated her apprehensions to her brother.

"I do not think there is any danger from the Duchess Sorla," he answered. "She is a very proud woman. Proud women cannot be discarded one day and freshly won the next."

"Oh, my dear, if she be still in love with him!" said his sister, who did not see much security in this barrier.

Meantime Gladys was only very dimly aware of the causes for jealousy which were given her. She did not understand enough of the world or of the persons in it to be conscious of how much she might have to resent.

She felt that her husband cared but little about

her; she was sensible that his life contained numerous interests, friendships, and amusements in which she had no part, and of which she had scarcely any knowledge; but the complete innocence of her childhood hung too long about her like a golden mist not to be as yet a veil which blinded her to much. She had no comprehension of men's natures. Her father had tried to suggest their faults and follies to her, but her mind had not embraced the extent of his meaning. Only very slowly, little by little, as months succeeded months, did she begin to comprehend the vast difference between what was, and what seemed to be, in the world in which she found herself, and realised the vast extent to which unacknowledged affections and influences have in it a greater potency than those which are visible and avowed.

In her ignorance she had fancied that, because she was his wife, Guilderoy would for ever prefer her to all others; she learned that it was rather almost all others whom he preferred to herself. He was, indeed, never unkind to her, or otherwise than courteous. The greatest want of kindness which he ever showed was in a lack of attention to what she said, a restrained but yet perceptible weariness whenever she was alone with him. He was liberal even to extravagance in all he gave her; he was scrupulously punctilious in politeness to her before his household or his friends, and he was seldom ruffled to the utterance even of an impatient sentence to her ear. But, all the same, she felt that she was very little, perhaps nothing, to him; and when she recalled the adoration of the first few weeks of their union she felt a cold like ice close in about her

heart; for she knew all that she missed, all that she had lost.

No doubt there were many women of her age who would have been made quite sufficiently happy by the material powers and pleasures which he had given her. But she was not. Her pride was incessantly wounded and her affections were incessantly starved; and she was sore of heart amidst the profusion, the dazzling changes, the movement and the constant crowds, of her new existence.

She had not very much time left to her to think; but her thoughts were often bitter and troubled when her lips were speaking those conventional phrases in which she had learned to take refuge. The preoccupation and depression which were so often on her took from the charm of her personal loveliness, because they robbed it of light and animation. The glad spontaneous smile with which she had welcomed the name of Sir Roger de Coverley, or recognised the bay of Christ'slea in David Cox's drawing, was never seen upon her features now.

"You have really marvellously acquired all the *morgue* of an English great lady," he said to her once. "I never imagined you would be able to assume so easily the impassiveness and unpleasantness which my sister and many like her of the old school think so necessary to the high breeding of a woman of fashion!"

He did not perceive that what were dead in her were the vivacity, the *insouciance*, and the abandonment of youth.

"That is cruelly unkind; I do all that I can to be

whatever you wish," she answered him with tears brimming in her eyes.

He rose; restless and angry, and unreasonable.

"For Heaven's sake, my dear, do not give way to hysteria like that," he said with much unconscious exaggeration. "I thought you too proud and high-spirited to burst out crying at every word which does not flatter you."

"I do not want flattery," she said indignantly. "I want only justice."

"Anything which is not flattery seems injustice to a woman," he said irritably. "One can never hint a fault to them but what they think we are brutal and ungenerous. All that I ask of you is to enjoy your life—at least, to look as if you did. It is no immense demand, assuredly. You have everything which attracts and pleases other women, and yet nothing whatever seems to attract or please you. I did not make the world, and I cannot alter it. You must learn to take it as it is. We all have to do so, or become intolerable to ourselves and others."

"There is only one thing I want," she said in a voice so low that he scarcely heard it.

"What is that?" he said with some impatience. She looked at him, and could not bring herself to answer.

"Nothing you can give me," she said with a return of that coldness which he at once admired and detested in her.

"What some one else can give then?" he asked with a sudden surprise and displeasure.

"No."

"Cannot you speak, my dear, without enigmas or

monosyllables? If it be anything in reason you shall have it."

She looked at him wistfully. She longed to say to him all that she felt, to open her heart to him in all its longing and pain, but the sensitiveness and pride of her temper kept the words of confession and entreaty from her lips. She was afraid of his contemptuous and slighting reception of her expressions of affection, and she had the overwhelming consciousness that she was too indifferent to him for him ever to take the trouble to penetrate or analyse her feelings for him.

"I wish I could please you," she said, instead of the words which had been on her lips; and these seemed to him stiff and commonplace, and left him cold.

"You please me in much," he said. "I am very proud of you in much. But I would willingly see you gayer of temper and more easily interested. It is so much, my dear, for a woman to be amiable! And nothing is so unamiable as the tendency you display to brood over your own wrongs and *poser* to yourself as superior to the rest of the world. Pray do not let this inclination to tearful scenes grow upon you. Nothing is so distressing to any man; and I more, even than most men, abhor everything approaching to a scene. Remember that, dear, and try to be happy. If I have not made you so it is my misfortune, not my fault."

He believed what he said.

"It will be terrible," he thought when he was alone, "if she become *la femme incomprise*. There is nothing on earth so distressing, so unconsolable, so absolutely unreasonable upon earth. At present she is young, and really lovely, and it does not matter much;

but, years hence, it will be unbearable, and how is one to check it? It is always a malady which grows. Good heavens! why were women made like that—always analysing your feelings and their own, always teasing you to tell them that what is dying is not dead; always pulling up love by its roots if they think its blossom looks sickly, always killing by over-culture the very thing they most wish should live eternally? I know she is good. I think her lovely. I was very fond of her for a while; I am not now; I cannot help that. But it is possible that I might be so again if she did not weary me. Cannot she understand that? No; they never understand it. They can never comprehend that one's soul revolves like the earth, and has its summer and winter solstice. With them it must be all summer at canicular heat, and if they cannot have the sunshine of summer, they will at least have its storms."

And he went out of his house with a sense of extreme irritation.

"I have always been kind to her," he would have said, if any one had reproached him; and he was indeed wholly unaware that anything of kindness was lacking in him. He had had a nervous dread of her displaying any attachment to him in the world, and he was relieved to find that she was so undemonstrative and so reasonable. She suffered with all the terrible anxiety of instinctive jealousy whenever she saw his attentions to other women, and when she realised how easy it was for them to enchain and charm him, and how impossible for her. But her fears took no definite shape; even her sense of pain came rather from the idea of her own insufficiency to him than of his inconstancy to her.



## CHAPTER XXII.

ONE day, Gladys returning unexpectedly from a drive, and going upstairs to her own rooms without summoning any servant, came suddenly on her head waiting woman, who was standing before her opened jewel-safe. It was an iron safe enclosed in an inlaid lac box of great beauty, and standing on a metal tripod, of which the feet were fastened to the floor by screws. The key was kept by herself on her watch-chain.

The woman did not hear her approach, and was standing in hesitation before the first jewel-tray; her hesitation ended in selecting rapidly two or three rings, which she slipped into the bosom of her dress. She was tempted, but afraid, to take the larger objects. She was a Scotchwoman, a widow, and very religious, high in esteem with, and long trusted by, great families; she had been in the service of Gladys since her marriage, when she had been hired for her by Lady Sunbury.

Her mistress now went up to her, without a sound and took the key out of her hand.

"Put back those rings you have stolen," she said in a calm voice. The woman turned red and white, trembled, stammered, and protested.

"Denial is of no use," said Gladys. "You have opened the safe with a false key, for I have its own

key on my chain, as you know. Put back the rings. You took three."

The maid, trembling in every limb, brought them from their hiding-place and restored them to their cases.

"You will not ruin me, my lady?" she said piteously. "My character is all that I have in the world to live by!"

"Have you taken anything before?"

"Not much," she muttered. "I never touched the safe before, so help me God! But you are very careless with your money, my lady, and it is a cruel temptation to put in the sight of poor folks."

Gladys looked at her in disgust.

"And I gave you fifty pounds last month to send your children to the sea!" she said slowly. "And I have trusted you. I have trusted you entirely ever since I took you into my service. Are you not ashamed to have repaid me thus?"

"You trust everybody, my lady," said the woman with ill-concealed scorn. "And there are those higher than I, and nearer to you than I, as repays you worse."

The face of Gladys flushed hotly.

"Leave me this moment," she said; "I will not arrest you for the sake of your children. Perhaps I do wrong to let a thief go unmarked into the world. But I hope that you will remember the danger you have escaped, and be honest to your employers in the future."

The woman made her a low curtesey, murmured a hypocritical blessing on her, and tried to kiss her hand. But Gladys motioned her away.

"Leave the house in ten minutes, or I will not answer for my longer clemency."

The maid curtseyed a second time, and withdrew in silence.

"You young fool!" she thought, "you have never looked if your other jewels are safe, and you little guess the nest-egg I have laid up from your carelessness every month since I have been in your service. Trusted me! Aye, you trust everybody, you born simpleton, and you go through the muck of the world as if it were a meadow of daisies!"

When she told Guilderoy of the incident he was amused.

"I am glad it is that sanctimonious Presbyterian, whom Hilda thought such a pearl," he answered. "My dear child, you may be quite sure that you are robbed right and left by all your people. We always are. The woes of employers should be sung by another Tom Hood. The whole world is just now on its knees in adoration before the poorer classes; all the cardinal virtues are taken for granted in them, and it is only property of any kind which is the sinner. But I fancy, if the truth were known, the scales are more evenly weighted than that, and that the continuous robbery to which property is subjected by those possessors of all the virtues who yawn in our halls, and gorge themselves on our food, would pretty well make the balance even between us. Do not think more about it. Take a Frenchwoman; you will not find her reading the Bible when you come home from a ball, but she will be much more agreeable to you, and infinitely more honest."

But to Gladys the matter was not so light.

To a nature which is very faithful, honest, and trustful, any deception seems the most appalling of crimes; and all ingratitude seems to enter the very flesh like a thorn.

Soon after the discovery of the theft a newspaper was sent to her with a broad mark placed against one of its paragraphs. She supposed it referred to some critique or essay of her father's; his scholarly work for the great reviews was always full of interest to her even when she did not understand the subject of it. But at the first line she now read a burning colour mounted over her face and throat; she saw that the paragraph was far from the harmless thing she thought, and that the news-sheet was one of those curses of modern society which live on supplying it with anonymous calumnies.

The marked lines, carefully worded to escape the laws of libel, but plain as the alphabet to the initiated, spoke jestingly of the tender relations existing between one of the largest landowners and most influential peers of the south-western counties and an olive branch brought from the antipodes; suggested with a sneer that the olive in this case would not mean peace, and recommended the noble Lothario to read the marriage service over once a week. In its studied innuendo and its cowardly malignity the insinuated charge was a masterpiece of its own venomous and iniquitous order. More subtle than Iago, more treacherous than Iscariot, more devilish than Satan's self, these privileged and unpunished carrion-eaters of the press bear ruin and shame and indignity into innocent hearts and happy homes, themselves safe and secure in their masked crime because the very loftiness of the place of those

whom they attack forbid them to descend into the mud of public tribunals.

She read it with horror, and flung it from her as she would have cast off a viper.

She had been too much surrounded by the hints and jests and smiles of the world not to comprehend to what and to whom the slander pointed. But it was the first time that the full meaning of her husband's attentions to women grew plain to her.

She paced to and fro her room in a paroxysm of disgust and horror. She had the sensation of falling headlong down from some giddy height. All the force, the passion, and the scorn which slept under her outward seriousness and serenity leaped up in her. She seized the paper from the corner whither she had flung it, and tore it with quivering hands into a thousand pieces.

At that moment Aubrey entered. One glance at her face told him that she was suffering from some great shock.

"My dear child, what can possibly have happened?" he asked her in great concern.

It was four o'clock; he was going down to the House, and had come in for a moment on his way to bring her some political news.

She told him in a few broken and ashamed words what she had read.

"It is not true? It cannot be true?" she asked him, gazing with heart-breaking entreaty into his face.

"Of course it is not true, my dear," he answered, avoiding her gaze; and he said in his soul, "God for-

give me if I tell her what is a falsehood!—after all it may not be true.”

“You should not read those papers,” he added. “The men who fatten and grow rich on them should be flogged at the cart’s tail from Kensington to Shore-ditch. When I think that they drink burgundy, and drive in broughams, while we send other men who snatch a watch or a purse to the treadmill, I feel that our whole hollow system of society and civilisation is so accursed that it will be all too good a fate for us if our whole city perishes by the Clan-na-gael.”

“But is it true?” she repeated, in all a woman’s seclusive narrowing of thought of her own sufferings and passions. “You know—you know—he *does* admire her.”

“I do not believe he admires her. He plays with her. She amuses idle moments for him in society, that is all,” replied Aubrey with some embarrassment. “My dearest child, do not distress yourself. An Olive Shiffton is not worth one tear of yours.”

“But I have seen——” The words were broken in their utterance by a sob in her throat.

Aubrey sighed heavily; he felt all the restless pain of a man before the sorrow of a woman to whom he is sincerely attached, and whom it is utterly out of his power to console.

“You have seen him flirting with her. All that means nothing. You must not put any false construction on it. She is a pretty woman and an audacious; but she has neither the good breeding nor the good taste which could ever make her really charming to a man who has both. How can you read these foolish and villainous news-sheets

"This one was sent to me marked. I thought it was something about some essay of my father's."

"Very likely she sent it herself," said Aubrey. But there he wronged her; it was the discharged maid who had sent it. "She is an adventuress, nothing better, though London society has taken her to its bosom. My dear Gladys, do not descend to any thought of her. It is beneath you."

"That is easily said!" she murmured, with a faint smile.

"And difficult to feel. That I quite understand. But not impossible, I think, is it? Not to a proud and loyal nature? Not to your father's daughter?"

She was silent. He was infinitely grieved for her. He felt an intensity of indignation on her behalf which he could not express lest he should lend weight to her suspicions and strength to her anger. His affection for her was full of compassion, and he felt much what he would have felt if he had seen a child that he was fond of struck a blow on its tender flesh.

He endeavoured to make her apprehensions and her wrongs seem lighter than he knew that they had every right to be, because he was convinced that any evidence of her indignation given to his cousin would only cause dissension and disunion, and lead to a scene which would very likely end in final rupture.

"You have never been intimate with this person?" he asked.

"Never. I bow to her; and he told me to send her a card for our great ball; that was all."

"Then you will have no trial of intercourse with her. I am sure that he will not ask you to invite her

to Ladysrood. He knows what my sister's and his sister's opinions of her are. Next season you may be sure he will have forgotten she exists. You will say nothing of this to him?"

"No?"

Her accent was interrogative, doubtful, reproachful.

"No," said Aubrey. "No; certainly not if you are wise, my dear. He is not a man to be patient under interrogation or reproach. If you appeared to believe such a story you would possibly excite, you would inevitably irritate him. He will see and know nothing of it. He never reads newspapers by any hazard, and you may be sure that no one will venture to speak of this to him."

"But something should be done? Is such an offence as that to pass? Am I to be humiliated in such a way, and no one of all my friends revenge it?"

"Leave the matter to me," said Aubrey. "You are a part of my family. All that ought to be done shall be done. But for your own sake, my dear, do not open this subject with Guilderoy."

She was silent still.

All the burning pain of the first deadly knowledge of her life was like fire in her veins. To her, as to every woman who loves and is wronged, the hardest task of all was to be meek and to endure with patience.

"You believe that I am your friend?" said Aubrey. gravely, as he took her hands in his own. She raised her eyes to his heavy with tears.

"Oh, yes," she said, with deep emotion. "You are the only friend I have, except my father."



Aubrey was deeply touched, but he restrained all that he felt.

"Do not say that, dear; you have many who care for you. My sister cares very warmly; and were she here she would say the same to you as I. Do not be the first to break your peace with Evelyn; if you were to speak of this bitterly—and you could not speak of it calmly—it would be a firebrand which would set in a blaze the whole of your relations with him, present and future."

She did not answer. She could not say even to Aubrey what she felt in her heart, that she was absolutely nothing to her husband, and that the violence of anger from him would have seemed almost more easily endurable than the sense that he only gave her outward courtesies and that sort of indifferent regard which he felt for her because she was physically beautiful, and so did him honour in the world.

"You will promise me?" said Aubrey. "I have not a moment to lose. I must be at the House in ten minutes' time; tell me before I go that you will follow my counsels. Believe me they are such as Vernon himself would give you were he here."

"I will try," she answered.

"That is not enough. You must say, 'I will.' You will keep your promise once given, I know."

She hesitated a moment; then she said in a low voice:

"You can judge best, I daresay. I will not speak of it."

"That is right, and brave, and wise. One day you

will thank me," said Aubrey; he kissed her forehead gravely with his accustomed salute and left her.

It had cost him much to keep to her a tone so calm and in semblance almost unsympathetic. He felt that if he had met Guilderoy upon the staircase of the house it would have been a hard struggle not to have insulted him in her behalf. But he knew that the advice which he had given her was sound. She would have to learn to bear such trials as these in silence. Probably much heavier ones would await her in the future.

"Poor child!" he thought sadly. His heart was heavy as he walked towards Westminster. His thoughts went back to the days of his early and secret marriage; the fatal mistake of his boyhood, which had been confessed to his father but to no other creature in the world. He recalled the immense devotion, the exaggerated constancy, which he had given in the ardour and loyalty of youth to one whose worthlessness he had learned too late. How strange, how contradictory, how cruel, he thought, the caprices and the awards of fate! He who in the loneliness of rank and power would have deemed a great, a disinterested, and a faithful love the dearest of earth's treasures, had been betrayed where he had given heart and soul and honour; and his cousin, to whom to give constancy was impossible and to receive it was wearisome, had the whole life of this beautiful child centered in him, and was moved by it rather to impatience and annoyance than to any other emotion!

"He will want some day what he throws away

now," thought Aubrey as he walked to his place in the Chamber.

And the next moment he knew that this reflection was romantically false; that it was beyond all other things unlikely that Guilderoy would ever be met by any such chastisement in kind; and that in the treasure-house of love it is frequently those who give the least who most receive.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

"I HAVE not a doubt the Shiffton woman had it put in herself to compromise him. It is just the sort of thing she would do," said the Duchess of Longleat, when he spoke of the matter to her.

"He has no right to place himself in a position to be compromised," said Aubrey.

"The best advice to her," said the Duchess, "would be to flirt outrageously; to compromise herself, to awaken him and affright him. But one hesitates to tell her that, it is always playing with edged tools."

"And I do not think she would do it if you did tell her. The swan cannot affect the parade of the peacock. She is not of that type."

"No, she will not flirt," said the Duchess. "But she may do worse. If she be thus chilled and offended, she may throw herself into some flood of real passion, half out of vengeance, and half out of the need of love. That is usually the way with women who are reserved in manner but have warm hearts."

"There is no such passion in our day."

"Oh, my dear, that is a mere phrase. There is as much, or as little, as there ever was probably. Your favourite Greeks and Latins were as fond of butterfly loves as our society is, if I remember aright the verses that you used to translate to me at Balfrons when we were children."

"Yes, but theirs *were* loves, whilst they lasted; in most of the 'affairs' of our days what is there except vanity, advertisement, often avarice, sometimes jealousy, at best, sensual impulses? Of passion nothing, or almost nothing."

"I think she would be capable of more."

"I think so too; she is capable of more; but it is thrown away on a man who does not even perceive it."

"She will not always give everything for nothing."

"Probably; and that makes her danger. If she ever love anyone else, she will not be content with one of the passing *liaisons* of which we see so much; she will believe herself lost, as women believed in old days, and will end her life wretchedly in ceaseless remorse."

"It is Guilderoy who should have the remorse."

Aubrey smiled bitterly.

"My dear! Do you think he could ever be stirred to such an emotion, even if he stood by her dead body? He would say that she had always been unreasonable, and unsympathetic. Every woman seems to him unsympathetic, and unreasonable, who does not at once understand his desertion of her."

He felt the greatest anger against his cousin; he had always been impatient of his many changes and his countless passions, and he had blamed him for wasting

all his years and his intelligence in the mere pursuit of women who only wearied him as soon as they were won. But now his anger against him took a more personal shape. He felt intolerant of his neglect of his duties and his indifference to all that was noblest and worthiest of culture in the nature of Gladys.

He preserved silence towards him, because his intimate experience of the world told him that interference has almost always unhappy issues, and he saw no way in which it would be possible for him to convey to Guilderoy his own opinions without producing such a quarrel as must inevitably put an end to all intimacy between them. Besides, what effect could remonstrance of any kind have upon a temperament like his cousin's?

If he did not care for his wife, what condemnation or persuasion could ever induce him to do so? Feelings are not to be called into existence by censure or argument. They are wind-sown flowers, and must spring how and where they will.

Gladys kept her word.

She never mentioned the matter to Guilderoy, and she never flinched or even betrayed anger when she met Olive Shiffton in society, as she constantly did. Her manner grew a little colder, a little graver, to all the world than it had been before; and all the women, and many a man said what a pity it was that she was so silent, and looked so uninterested, that none could, in common parlance "get on" with her; but that was all. She went out into the world with her pain hidden under conventional courtesies, with quite as much courage as the Spartan boy who hid the growling cub beneath his cloak.

Was it true? That wonder, that doubt, haunted her every hour. It occupied her every thought. It almost made her forget her little dead boys lying in their tiny coffins on beds of dead white roses in the churchyard of Ladysrood. Was it true? Was it?

At times, horrible coarse temptations assailed her, things that she had read of or heard of, means by which women in jealous pain learned the truth through interrogated servants or bribed messengers. But such temptations only passed through her mind for moments, as hot winds sweep over fair fields. Her loyalty and her pride alike rejected their tempting. Yet the impression grew more strongly upon her that it was true. There was, or she fancied there was, an insolence of triumph in the black languid eyes of Olive Shiffton whenever they met hers across a crowded room, which to her tortured fancy was confirmation strong as proof of holy writ. And she had not even the solace of Aubrey's presence, for ten days after the day on which she had received the journal he had been compelled to go to Balmoral as the minister in attendance on the Queen.

What was the use of a great love, she thought wearily, if he to whom it was given, neither heeded nor wanted it?

It was certainly beautiful in theory for her father to bid her make hers so great, that her husband could find no other equal to it; but if its force, its sincerity, its magnitude, only formed a total which was wearisome to the object of it, what then? What good could it effect? To what purpose did it exist? She could comprehend that women might pardon inconstancy, where it was loyally confessed and generously atoned for; she

could imagine that there might be relations which only became closer, sweeter, and dearer for temporary separation and offences of the passions; but neither of these was her case. Guilderoys neither confessed nor atoned, neither quarrelled with, nor admitted that he offended her. He simply went his own way as though he had never married her, and was at once so calm, so courteous, and so careless that such serenity hurt and insulted her more in her own sight than any quarrel with her would have done. Aubrey and her father both spoke of her duties as making patience, silence, and endurance her obligation; but she was too young and too much in love with her husband to resign herself to that mute course without the most painful effort. No doubt they were right, no doubt they were wise, she thought bitterly, but they were not women with aching hearts that they could understand. Did anyone understand? No one in the world, she thought. Every one seemed to consider that such trials as hers were inevitable and mattered little. Every one seemed to hold that the material advantages of position and fortune were compensation enough for all pain.

She loved him with all the tender and fanciful poetry of youth and womanhood; but any expression of it had been crushed into silence in her, by the consciousness which came to her very early that it would seem to him inopportune and wearisome. He was not a man to prolong passion after possession, and any evidence of his wife's for him would have been sure to find him cold and critical. He had hinted as much to her once, and her mind, sensitive and receptive to a fault, never forgot the impression given to her by it. He had with-

out intending it conveyed to her the sense that she was his, much as were the other decorations of his state and his position; the companion of his days of ceremony, not of his hours of pleasure, the associate of his rank, but not of his affections.

He had not intended to give her this impression in any measure so strongly as she had received it; but it had been given even in the early Venetian days, and could not be effaced. When the speaker is careless of what he says, and the hearer listens with apprehension and self-torment, the latter constantly is wounded when the former had no intent whatever to wound.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

SOME weeks later in the season she chanced to stop her carriage one afternoon at a fashionable club; old Lord Balfrons, who scarcely ever stirred out of his own houses, had been in person to her desiring to see Guilderoy at once. She did not know at all where he was, and said so, but his uncle was sure that he was at one of his clubs at that hour, and bade her go and inquire. The old marquis was angered and anxious; he had set his fancy on securing a certain Vandyke which had come into the market, and in his son's absence required the offices of his nephew. He was petulant, eager, and unreasonable; as great age, like youth, is apt to be when there is a chance that one of its whims may be thwarted; and Gladys, afraid to vex him, did



what she had never done before, and drove to various houses in Pall Mall and St. James' Street.

At one of them the porter, new to his place and ill-versed in the prudence which his situation required, came to her carriage-door with a note in his hand. He said that Guilderoy had not as yet been to the club that day; but there was a letter which had come for him; would her ladyship take it? Gladys took the envelope in her hand, and she recognised the grey olive leaf and the gold letter S. For an instant a horrible temptation assailed her; she held the note one brief instant in her hand while the colour changed in her cheeks from pale to red, from red to pale, in rapid alternation. In another instant she had conquered the temptation; she remembered the scorn which her father would have for her if she yielded to it.

She gave the letter back to the porter. "Lord Guilderoy will take it when he comes," she said, in a voice which trembled a little despite her efforts. "To the park," she said to her servant; and the horses bore her rapidly away.

The day chanced to be fine; the sunshine was gay. Her friends and acquaintances saluted her by the score; but though she mechanically returned their salutations she was not sensible of what she did. The noise of the streets was like the sound of a great sea in her ears, and the yellow light, with the motes of the sunbeams and the vapours of the smoke dancing in it, was vague and confused before her eyes.

The sight of the letter had confirmed the suspicion which had haunted her for some days. Jealousy seemed to her a miserable and vulgar thing; a wretched

weakness which any woman of courage and pride should scout as a degradation; and yet, being only human, she was jealous, and she suffered intensely.

"Does pain always make vileness so easy?" she thought bitterly. That she should have felt such a temptation seemed for one moment to have sunken her fathoms deep in indignity. John Vernon had taught her the code of honour of a high-bred gentleman, the kind of teaching which is unhappily omitted from the education of most women, yet which is more necessary for their own happiness, and that of those connected with them, than all the learning or graces in the world. Had he wholly ceased to care for her? Had he, indeed, ever really cared at all? The doubt which had so long festered and ached in her heart became a certainty. She did not believe that he had ever loved her. In truth he never had.

She did not see him that day or evening at all; they had different engagements. The next day they had a dinner party at home; she saw him for a moment before it, and took the occasion to say to him; "Would you mind my going to Ladysrood for a few days? I am tired of the hurry of the season."

"My love, always do what you wish," answered Guilderoy, with the careless amiability of indifference. "I would not remain long were I you; it would look odd at this moment."

"He does not even wish me away," she thought. "So little does my presence affect him!"

Aloud she answered, "I will only stay three days; only time enough to see my father."

"Your father should come into the world. It is a

pity he is so eccentric. He would be the most popular man in London if he would only show himself."

"He would not care for popularity."

"I wish you did; at the least it is a very amiable quality, and wins one innumerable friends."

"You are very popular."

There was an accent which sounded disagreeably in the ear of Guilderoy in the few simple words.

"I do not think I am," he said with irritation. "I care too little about other people. I am too great an egotist, as you and your father are always telling me, and I believe it is true."

"You are very popular," she repeated quietly. "At least with women."

"You do me much honour," he replied with a little laugh, not entirely free from embarrassment. At that moment the first of their guests entered their drawing-rooms. The next morning, very early, before Guilderoy was awake, she left the house, and took the express train of the forenoon to Ladysrood without announcing her arrival there to any one. In the coolness of the late summer afternoon she drove her ponies over the moor to her father's cottage. The sandy road, running between high banks of marl and sandstone, crowned with blossoming furze, with nodding foxgloves, and with osmunda fern, was the same which John Vernon had taken after the ceremony of her marriage, when he had wished the golden flowers to be a symbol of her path through life.

The evening was grey and still, and very peaceful; there was a honey smell in the air rising from the short wild thyme; it had rained the day before, and there

was a delicious moisture in the air; the moors were lonely, here and there girls drove a flock of geese across them, or a herd of red and dappled cattle was seen browsing quietly. The simple familiar scene touched her painfully; it seemed centuries since she had been a child there herself, as careless as the girl that drove the geese, as the young heifers that cropped the thyme: and yet not much more than three years had gone by since she had been found in the hut with the fox cub, and had left childhood behind forever, not knowing her loss.

She found John Vernon reading a mighty folio of ancient date under the apple trees of his pasture, and for a moment she felt a child again, when she saw the ivy-shrouded porch, the homely sweet-smelling garden, the low thatched roof, and the lattice window of her own chamber. She never came to Christslea without a sense of peace returning to her for so long as she stayed under its tangle of honeysuckle and of sweet-briar.

"Why did you not tell me, my dear? I would have awaited you at Ladysrood," said Vernon. "What can possibly bring you down in the height of the season? Are you not well? You look tired."

"The life is fatiguing, there is nothing real in it; it is all haste and turmoil."

"Nevertheless you should enjoy even that at your age. I think they call it being *dans le mouvement*, do they not? I suppose the *mouvement* is much wilder and more breathless than it was in my day. However, my dear child, whatever the sins of the world, I am

grateful to them since they have sent you to lighten my loneliness."

"You will come back to Ladysrood with me, will you not? I shall only be here one day, I must go back on the third; there is a State ball; they would not like me to be absent from it."

"I will come with you willingly," said John Vernon. "You know without you at Christ'slea, the summer brings no flowers for me."

"I love to be here!" said his daughter. "It makes me feel young again."

When she had renewed her acquaintance with the old man and woman who formed the household of Christ'slea, with the cocks and the hens, with the birds and the bees, with the red and white stocks and the clumps of sweet-william, with the big old dog, and the tame fox in the orchard, and to please the old servants had drunk a little cyder and eaten a piece of honeycomb, sitting in the porch, she drove her father home with her in the now darkening night to Ladysrood.

"Really, my love, you should be a very happy woman," said Vernon, as the ponies trotted through the deep ferny brakes of the park over the smooth grass drives, and going at a gallop up the lime avenue of the western entrance, were pulled up before the great house standing glorious and spiritualised in the white moonlight, with all its towers and pinnacles and fantastic corbels standing out against the starlit sky.

"Because the park is fine and the house is handsome?" said Gladys, in a tone which he had never heard from her. "Surely these are very coarse and

material reasons for *you* to allege? I thought you never weighed externals."

"I do not think they are coarse reasons," said Vernon, a little coldly. "Beauty is a great element in happiness. Not the only factor, certainly, but a very important factor nevertheless, for those who have eyes to see it. I think the possession of an ancient, historical, and beautiful house is one of the most poetic pleasures in life; and I think, too, that the indifference with which many of the owners of such houses consider them is one of the greatest signs of decay in any nobility. Not long ago, too, my dear, you were in love with Ladysrood. I hope you do not tire of it because it is yours. That would be a sad lesson for London life to have taught you."

"I like it very much," said Gladys; but the tone had no warmth in it. "I daresay if my little boys had lived I should have felt affection for it."

"You will have other children, no doubt," said Vernon, "and I should have thought there were already existing reasons for you to be attached to your home."

She did not reply.

"I confess I am very attached to it myself," he continued, not wishing to dwell too seriously on the subject. "It is a really noble place, and though it is very eclectic in the many various tastes which have gone to make it what it is, yet it is harmonious even in its contradictions of styles and epochs. The only perfect house is a house in which one reads as in a book the history of a race."

It was nine o'clock. Dinner awaited them, served in the small dining-room of the Queen Anne wing of the house. Vernon ate nothing, as was his custom at that hour, and his daughter ate little; her favourite dogs supplied willing appetites. The dinner over, she and he strolled out on to the west terrace; the air was very warm, the stars brilliant, the sound of the distant sea came to their ears on the silence; behind them were the lighted windows of the wings; before them the quaint green garden, with its high clipped hedges, its fishponds, its yew trees under which Charles Stuart had played at bowls, and Elizabeth Tudor had sat to watch a midsummer masque sparkling amongst the roses. They stood awhile leaning against the balustrade of the terrace, then Vernon sat down on one of the stone chairs, and said quietly:

"Tell me, my love, why have you come to me?"

Gladys did not change her position. She still leaned her arms on the balustrade, her chin rested on her hands; her eyes looked into the dewy darkness of the hushed night.

"I wanted to tell you what a vile and mean thing I nearly did," she answered slowly; and she told him of her temptation to open the letter.

Vernon sat mute, his face in shadow, and he spoke no word till she had finished quite; even then he waited some moments ere he answered.

"You could not help your longing," he said at length. "It is just these inclinations towards base actions which sometimes enter the highest souls which

make us understand how the myth of the devil arose. I am thankful, indeed, that my daughter did not stoop to baseness."

She turned her face towards him, and her eyes were full of tears.

"He does not love me, you know. I have known it a long time. I do not think he ever did."

"My dear! You are dreaming! Why else should he have married you?"

"It was a caprice—he has so many caprices. Do you remember that line in the Phædrus: 'What we call winged Eros, the immortals call Pteros for his flighty nature?' Pteros is his love. He knows no other."

John Vernon listened with bitter regret. He had known that it was so; he had always known it; but he had hoped that she would be young enough and blind enough not to find it out herself—at all events, not to find it out until time should have rendered it a matter of little moment to her. All his heart yearned towards her in this her first great sorrow, but he believed that sympathy would be the unkindest kindness which he could give her. What was the use of feeding morbid regrets and sense of wrong which could never avail in any way to get her back what she believed that she had lost?

"I think you speak very bitterly and hastily on small grounds," he said, resisting his desire to sympathise with her, and curse the man who had made her unhappy. "It does not in the least follow that because a woman writes to him secretly that he invites, or



even cares for her, to do so. It may be even an annoyance to him that he cannot prevent. You cannot tell."

"I can tell. I have seen them together a hundred times. I believe the whole world knows it—except myself."

"Well, let us admit that it is so. I do not defend him. But I do say, my dear, that jealousy in a man's wife makes her odious to him and ridiculous to the world at large. In a woman who is not his wife jealousy may be permissible, because her tenure is so insecure that she may naturally tremble for its duration. But in his wife it is to others absurd and to him intolerable. *Une femme qui se respecte n'est jamais jalouse.* My dear child, you are still very young; you still know no more than very young women do of the characters and passions of men. My dear, I can assure you of one thing—no man is constant to one woman. Male constancy is not in nature, and therefore it is not demanded in law. I understand that you are in love with your husband, and therefore it is impossible for you to understand why he is no longer in love with you. I can only tell you, my child, that nature has made man inconstant; utterly inconstant through his senses, even when he remains constant in his heart. It is terrible to you; it is terrible to every woman when she learns it for the first time. But the only women who ever arrive at retaining happiness are those who recognise this as a fact, and allow for the man's infidelity as they would pardon an infant's forwardness."

She was silent; her chin still rested on her hands,

her eyes still gazed into the shadowy woods which surrounded the gardens beneath her. Her whole soul rebelled passionately at the suggestion that she should accept inconstancy as inevitable and forgive it as immaterial; she had all the vehemence, the narrowness, the exclusive passion of youth and of womanhood.

"Why did you not tell me all this—before you let me marry?" she said at last, very bitterly.

Vernon had long known that some day or other that reproach would be brought against him.

"It would have been no use, my love," he said gently; "no use whatever if I had. Love had blinded you. And I could not even speak of such things to a child like you. What could you have understood? You do not even understand much now."

"I understand, then, you think him right?"

"I have never said so. I do not necessarily approve a thing because I admit its possibility. Abstractedly, I agree with Plato that men should govern their passions, but actually I know that they do not do so until they are at least as old as I am, and not always then. And what I most want you to see is, that even if your husband be indeed unfaithful to you, which is a mere assumption on your part, you will gain nothing by the endeavour to resent what you cannot alter. After all, my child, if a woman cannot keep the affections she has once won, pride should keep her from lamenting her own failure, and tenderness should make her silent on it. You seem to me to be drifting into a state of irritation and of *aigreur*, which can serve no purpose except that of your enemies, if you have any, who

may wish to see the breach widened between you and Guilderoy."

"The women who care for him wish it no doubt!"

"Well, it is into their hands that you play. You have self-control and you have intelligence. I want you to perceive that, whatever she may feel, only a weak woman and a silly woman degrades herself by the exhibition of conjugal jealousy."

She was again silent; she bit her lips to restrain the emotion which well nigh mastered her. She knew that her father was right, but the advice struck on the aching warmth of her young heart like cold steel on warm flesh.

John Vernon's own heart ached for her, and had he followed his impulse he would have given her the mere fond unreasoning consoling sympathy that another woman would have given. But he knew that it would be the most unwholesome thing that he could offer her in such a moment.

"You have said nothing, I hope, to Guilderoy?" he asked her. She shook her head. "Pray continue to say nothing. If it be not as you suppose, a false accusation would incense him greatly; if it be as you suppose, it could do no possible good. You would drive him into either a subterfuge or a rage. Neither is a desirable result. Believe me, dear, a wise woman never asks questions. What is the use of asking them? The person tormented takes refuge in prevarication or in downright falsehood. His character is irritated and injured, and the woman who has worried him sinks

farther and farther from any chance of ever obtaining his true and voluntary confidence. Love may be won and confidence may be won, but neither can be bullied."

"What am I to do then? To learn to care nothing? Is that the best?" she asked in a cold voice.

"God forbid," said Vernon. "What did I tell you, my child, the day you first came home after your marriage? That you must care so much that you will give him an affection he cannot get elsewhere. I admit that this requires self-negation, self-control, self-effacement, in a measure, which it is exceedingly hard to attain. Most women are self-centred even when they are not selfish. Their egotism is wholly unlike male egotism, but it is apt to be very narrow and very exacting. A man changes and forgets; the woman often does neither; but it does not follow that for that reason she is unselfish, though no doubt she thinks she is, in her close adherence to her memories. My dear child, life is not all a poem nor all a playtime. It is often monotonous, trying, and full of irritation. This period of yours is especially so to you. But you will not make it smoother or happier by thinking yourself wronged on small proof."

"But if it be true that I am? Then——"

Then—well, even then I would counsel you to bear it with silence and with dignity. Expostulation and upbraiding are bad weapons, and cut the hand which uses them. I never thought that Lord Guilderoy was of a character which would give you happiness. I did

not tell you so, but I told him so constantly. He has the natural faults of a man whom the whole world has conspired to spoil. He is imaginative, impatient, capricious, and inflammable; such men are always inconstant; they cannot help being so any more than the vane can help turning with the wind. But he has many lovable and generous qualities; to you he has been exceptionally generous; think of his finer nature and pardon him its weaker side. That is the only counsel I dare give you, for your sake and for his. Alas! I see you are unconvinced."

"I am unhappy!" she said in her heart, but she did not say it aloud. She was angered against her father; she had expected from him indignant denunciation and a sympathy which would not pause to weigh or analyse. Her heart was aching bitterly with passionate pain which would have willingly found vent in some rash action; the calm philosophy of John Vernon seemed to her like so much ice given her when she shivered in the cold and asked for a shelter by the fire.

"It is no use speaking of it," she said, wearily; after a while, "Let us go in; I think the turmoil of London hurts me less than all this summer silence. One wants to be so happy to bear to look at the stars!"

Vernon rose and put his arm tenderly upon her shoulder.

"My dear child! you will be happy again. You have not bidden adieu to life at twenty years old! My

advice sounds very chill and unsympathetic to you no doubt; but it is sound. It is of no use to rebel against woes which spring from character. You are very young still; you are a beautiful woman; if you have tact and patience and forbearance you will ultimately vanquish your rivals, if rivals you truly have. But if you display jealousy, if you descend to baseness, to espionage, to recrimination, you will forfeit your own esteem and you will lose all hold upon your husband. Men, my love, are not merciful to women's tears as a rule; and when it is a woman belonging to them who weeps, they only go out and slam the door behind them!"

"I shall not weep, believe me," she said, bitterly; and she drew herself away from his touch and went across the pavement of the terrace into the drawing-room which opened on to it; the wax lights were shining on the red satin wall-hangings, the rococo furniture, the Chelsea and Worcester china, the old Delft and Nankin vases; it was the room in which Guilderoy had told his sister of his intention to marry John Vernon's daughter.

Her father followed her, and looked at her in silence, with infinite pity.

"It was not my fault," he thought. "I did what I could. It was the old story, *si jeunesse savait!* Ah! *si jeunesse savait*, what marriage would ever be made at all?"

He took her hands in his.

"My dearest Gladys," he said, gravely, "I confess that I do not think your life will be very happy. I never thought that it would be. You have a great

position and great possessions, but you are not of a nature to be satisfied with these. But it lies with you to retain what one may say are the angels which stand about the throne of life—honour, unselfishness, and sympathy; they are not the smiling angels which youth loves best, but they have a comfort in them by a dying bed. Try that they shall always be with you. The rest of the heavenly troop will very likely come behind them uncalled.”

The tears, so long withheld, rushed into her eyes; she kissed the hands which held hers, and left the room. He let her go, and himself paced to and fro the long red room with agitated steps; it had cost him effort to keep so calm a tone, to give only so apparently niggard a sympathy.

“While I am here I can save her perhaps,” he thought. “But when I am gone?——”

And he knew that this might be soon, for what he had never told her was the frail tenure on which his own life hung, and the ever-near end of all things which was only warded off by that perfectly passionless and solitary life which he was supposed by her, and by all who knew him, to have selected by free choice.

“When I am gone——” he thought, and the thought was one of acute and intense pain to him. The idea that he would tell her husband his own secret, and beseech his better care of her, passed through his mind; but what use, he reflected, would it be? Guilderoy was gentle, courteous, and kind; easily moved, too, for awhile, and ready to promise impossibilities; he would be sorry, he would be touched, he would swear to be

governed by loyalty and constancy; and then, women and the world would surround him, and he would forget. It would be only waste of words. John Vernon never wasted words, and for a score of years had never asked for sympathy; and he had so long kept in his own breast the knowledge of the mortal disease within him that he could not have brought himself to speak of it without painful effort.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

"DID you ever hear of the story of Griseldis?" he asked her the next day as they strolled through the gardens.

"Yes; she was a very foolish woman."

"Certainly she looks somewhat of a fool to us. But perhaps she was in truth very wise; she gained what she wanted in the end."

"She had certainly a very pitiful spirit."

"Do you think so? Patience and silence are never pitiful, surely. They are grand qualities."

Gladys smiled with some scorn.

"A donkey is patient, so is a cow. We do not rate them very highly in the scale of creation."

"Do you often answer Evelyn in that tone?"

"I do not know. Yes, perhaps, I daresay I do. Why?"

"Only that it would possibly tend to make him seek the society of those who did not."

She was silent.

"We often complain," continued Vernon, with some dreaminess in his tone, "that others do not care for us, or cease to care for us; and we seldom ask ourselves if the fault is not ours, if we are not often irritating and even intolerable to them; if we try to understand them in what is opposed to us; if we endeavour

to give them what *they* wish, not what *we* wish. Love, which is made such a fuss about, is only an immense selfishness unless it does do this. What do you think? You despise Griseldis; what would you have had her do?"

"Go away."

"Go away? And leave her children?"

"She could have taken them with her."

"A dangerous vengeance. And she would have violated her marriage vows."

"Since he violated his, she would surely have been justified."

"Ah, my dear! the cases are not parallel. Both psychology and physiology will tell you so if you study them. Griseldis no doubt never studied either, but she was wise enough to act as if she had."

"When I was a child and read the story, I despised her."

"Then there is something of true womanhood lacking in you, my dear."

"Is true womanhood abject slavishness?"

"It is infinite abnegation of self."

Gladys laughed, and there was a sound of hardness in the laugh.

"Then women of the world have very little of it indeed. They dress, they flirt if they can, they spend money when they have it, and run up bills when they have not; they make a fuss over a quantity of useless undertakings which they call charity, or politics, as their taste is, but they never sacrifice themselves for one second of their time; when they take their lovers it is with a view of self-aggrandisement by some affair which

will make them more sought after by the world and by other men. There is not an emotion, scarcely even a sensual preference, in any one of their attachments. I wish that you would come into the world. You would see then there would be no place in it for Griseldis if she were revived."

"Griseldis is a figure of speech."

"Yes. Nowadays she would have the income of her settlements, the custody of her children, and the consolation of the newspapers!"

"You are rather cynical, my dear. It is not becoming to a young woman, and it is not lovable in an old one."

"Ah, I wish I had never left you and Christslea."

"Do you think you would have been contented if you had married a curate or a squire? I doubt it. There is something naturally *grande dame* in you which would have rebelled against small means and narrow lives."

"I never rebelled when I was with you."

"No. You were a good child, but you were a child. I did not welcome your marriage, but I doubt if I should have been stoic enough to complacently watch your roses fade, and your years slip away, in the rustic loneliness and homeliness of my cottage. It was lovely to see you in it at seventeen, but it would not have been lovely to see you in it at seven-and-twenty. What the French call *un beau mariage* is after all a magic wand to a maiden."

She did not speak, but she gave an impatient gesture.

Vernon looked at her earnestly. "Do you absolutely

regret yours?" he asked. "Would you undo it if you could?"

"This moment!"

There was the vibration of intense meaning in the words.

Vernon sighed.

"That is terrible if it be true. I hope you speak in haste and in offence. You are more unforgiving, Gladys, and less generous than I thought you. I thought that your feelings for Guilderoy were of a different kind."

"You have a curious tenderness for him!" she said, bitterly.

"I do not think I have any," replied her father. "But I confess that, as a man of honour, I feel that both you and I are bound to give him some indulgence in return for the confidence he placed in us, and for the great gifts (though you think them mere vulgar considerations) which he has lavished on you in an affection which, if not eternal, must have been genuine. I am the last person on earth to over-estimate such gifts; but I am also, I confess, the last person on earth who could tolerate the idea that my daughter, when a man trusted her with his name, and his good name, hated the one and imperilled the other. My dear, it was said by a Greek called Socrates, long before it was repeated by Christ, that it is not right to do evil, and that to say it has been done to us is no excuse or reason for us to return it. Nor can I easily conceive that one could feel any temptation to return it if it were done by a person we had ever once loved!"

He spoke very calmly, but there was an accent of sternness in his voice which she had never heard from

him. She felt for the first time in her life that she had in all the world no judge so just but none so unrelentingly severe as her father.

The question which sorely perplexed John Vernon was not to change or control the caprices of Guilderoy, for he considered that hopeless, but how to induce his wife to comprehend them in a measure and to view them, if not with pardon, at least with serenity and silence.

What else was there for her to do?

His natural affection for his child made him angered against the man who caused her mortification and pain, but the sense of justice which was equally strong in him made him conscious that it was impossible for such a man to confine his existence within the limits of such emotions and such actions as would be likely to please the ear and meet the approval of a woman as young as Gladys. There is an instinctive movement towards freedom, an instinctive aversion to self-confession, in the breast of every man who has not outlived his enjoyment of the warmth of passion and the pleasures of liberty.

"But alas! alas!" thought John Vernon, "so few women are wise enough to know this, and still fewer women are unselfish enough to act on it!"

Her dignity, her demands, her sentiments, her desires, her injuries and her rights, loom so large usually in a woman's sight that she never sees beyond them, and thus for ever misses truth.

The exceeding justness of his nature made him able to conceive the irritation that it would be to Guilderoy to account for all his hours to a woman as young,

and as incapable of comprehending his errors, as his wife was; and he could admit the innumerable temptations to inconstancy which his fortune, his world, and his disposition combined to make irresistible and continual to him. Now and then a man will conquer the world in the heart of a woman, but never will a woman conquer the world in the heart of a man. Whatever it be—the world of pleasure, of ambition, or of speculation—the passion of it having once entered his soul will reign there for ever till his last hour.

“It can never be the same thing between a man and a woman,” thought Vernon. “She—if she be a woman young and innocent—she has a clean bill of moral health, has nothing to conceal, and nothing that she would hesitate to confide. But he has and must have fifty thousand things in his past and present that are not subjects for confidence; his life cannot be narrowed to what is to be told to his wife. Other women have claims on his silence and honour: in a word he is a man, and requires a man’s large liberty of action. When moralists pretend that it should be otherwise they substitute a conventional fiction which has led to hopeless pretensions and heartburnings amongst women. Even a lover does not give for any length of time the same kind of fidelity that the woman gives to him, though a lover’s fidelity is more stimulated than that of a husband, more tempted to remain true because uncertain of its tenure. Dumas fils and many others writers are fond of pretending that fidelity should be equal in both sexes, but they only put forward a wholly untrue and impossible thesis, and make women wretched because they incite them to demand

what both nature and law will for ever unite to refuse them!"

He was grieved that Gladys was no wiser, no more magnanimous than the rest. Had the education he had given her been in fault? Had sea and moor, and Latin verse and Saxon Chronicle, not tended to make her into stronger stuff than the irrational, egotistical, and wholly unreasonable temper of the majority of her sex? Why must she, like them, take jealousy for devotion, irritation for passion, offence for dignity, mortification for martyrdom?

"You surely do not mean that Guilderoy would leave you for another woman?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, no," she answered bitterly. "He would neither love nor hate me enough to do anything of the kind. Why should he do it either? He does not think enough about me for me to be the slightest embarrassment to him."

Her father sighed as he heard.

Against indifference the gods themselves are powerless.

Had Desdemona waked from her murdered sleep she would have found the tenderest and most penitent of lovers in her jealous lord; but the amiable apathy of a careless and unobservant indifference has no quality in it of that kind which can be roused and changed into devotion or remorse.

"I think he even likes me!" she said with greater bitterness still. "I annoy him sometimes because I am not pliable, or facile, or amusable enough; but on the whole he likes me, and if receiving an innumerable quantity of presents were happiness I should be in

heaven. What he does not give in feeling he atones for in furs and jewels and *bibelots*!”

“I hope,” said John Vernon gravely, “that you do not say this kind of thing to anyone save to me?”

“No.” She coloured and hesitated: her nature was full of scrupulous truth, and baseness distasteful to her. She always told the truth both in letter and spirit. “I have sometimes said something, once or twice, to his cousin,” she added.

Vernon was surprised.

“You mean Lord Aubrey?”

“Yes; he has seen it for himself. He is very kind to me.”

“I should have thought he had no time to spend on a woman’s imaginary sorrows.”

“They are not imaginary, and he knows that they are not.”

She was for the first time strongly angered against her father. He seemed to be unfeeling, cold, and unjust.

“The more real they are the less would I speak of them—even to Aubrey—were I you.”

“He is not a stranger. He is a near relative and a dear friend of ours.”

“A very good friend too. But I should have thought he was sufficiently occupied with his friend Britannia, who, from having been a very virtuous housewife in bib and tucker, is now disposed to unloose her girdle and turn into a revolutionary mænad, and is troublesome accordingly.”

He spoke carelessly, for he did not wish to suggest to her any possible danger in the intimacy of Aubrey, whom he knew as a man of high honour and grave and



lofty character. Yet he said more seriously, after a pause, in which they passed down the long white rose-covered colonnade which was a favourite haunt of Guilderoys, and where his silken hammock hung at one end ready for his use if he should come there:

"Still I think it would be well, my love, not to talk of these things, whether they are magnified or not by your fancy and feeling. *Il y a une pudeur de l'âme.* That sounds a sentimental saying, but there is a truth in it. Whenever we begin to uncover our soul we are apt to forget that. We are all apt to lose that modesty which is after all the chief beauty of all its emotions. I know quite well that women have a need to unbosom their feelings which the rougher natures of men do not experience. But it is after all a weakness, a tendency which even they should contend against, for it is like opium-eating, it increases with indulgence, and in time saps and destroys the whole vitality."

"I think you mistake," said Gladys coldly. "It is not I who confide in anyone. There are things which speak for themselves, and signs which all who run may read. The whole world will not be blind because a man may wish that it should be so."

"That is true; but people will not offer us pity if they think we should take it as an affront, any more than they would offer money to a ruined gentleman if he remained a gentleman still."

"No one offers me pity," she replied, haughtily. "On the contrary, they, I believe, share your opinion that because I have made a *beau mariage* I can want nothing more from earth or heaven!"

"I have never said so, Gladys," replied her father with some coldness.

She was silent; conscious that she had spoken wrongly; conscious also that the companionship of Aubrey was chiefly welcome to her because, though he never put it into direct words, he had from the first moment that he had addressed her given her the sense that he did pity her, and understood why she had reason to be pitied, amidst all which seemed to the superficial observer the supreme felicities and success of her lot.

She knew the fineness of her father's penetration and intuition too well not to be sure that he must see even as Aubrey saw; and she was angered against him that he did not admit it himself with the indignation which would in her mood of that moment have been refreshing to her.

They had come to the end of the long avenue of white roses; it was carpeted with the fallen rose-leaves, and overhead the thick foliage, starred with the white blossoms, made the light fall in a green faint twilight about them.

"Let us talk of something else," said John Vernon. "Self-analysis is seductive, and Goethe benefited the world by his; but if we are not Goethes we are apt to become Obermanns in the indulgence of it; and even if Goethe had less contemplated himself, I for one should have loved him better. 'I have been listening to what the vines told me,' he said when he was in Italy. I wish he had listened oftener to the vines and less to 'the immense Me.' What a charming morning, my dear! How the birds sing, and the leaves glisten, and the roses

smile! There is so much in life beside our own passions and pains, if we could but think of it. '*Tant qu'un arbre poussera, ce sera bon de vivre!*' Is there not a certain truth in that?"

"To a gipsy, or to a poet," said his daughter, bitterly. "When do we have time to see a leaf come out? We are always surrounded by faces. Can one see the sea amongst the crowds on the beach at Biarritz, or the trees in the woods at Homburg, or the sunset as we drive home from the Bois? Of course the sea is there, and the trees and the sunset are there; but to see them in the sense that you speak of is impossible. One may have a day like this now and then, twice in the year perhaps, and then one realises all that one misses all the rest of the year; that is all. What do I see of all this when we are here with a great party? Of course it is all around us like a *décor de scène*. But I have no time to feel it; there are quantities of things to be done; questions of precedence, programmes of amusement, conversation to make up, toilettes to be changed incessantly, relays of guests to be assorted; of course one feels that the woods are beautiful, that the gardens are charming, but one has no leisure to look at them, or to breathe them in, as it were, as I used to lie under the orchard trees on a summer afternoon, and look through their boughs at the moorland lying high and purple in the heat; I used to notice everything then, from the dragon-fly in the foxglove to the cloud that meant rain for the morrow. But now I notice nothing; I have no time."

She looked with a sigh through the arched aisle of the rose-charmille.

Vernon echoed her sigh.

"And yet, my dear child," he said, "I fancy that if you were still Gladys Vernon living in my cottage, and there were any other Lady Guilderoys reigning here, you would be very likely to think her lot much brighter and more brilliant than your own. There is always that unkind discontent in human life. The monarch envies the sleep of the cabin-boy, and the cabin-boy thinks if he were only a king with no sea-water soaking his shirt, and no black billows between him and his home! It is always so; it is the rule of existence; and it suggests that Plato may be right, and that we have come from other worlds which are always haunting us and making us uncomfortable in this one."

He spoke lightly, for he wished her to think her sorrows rather general than individual; but his own heart was heavy. It was indeed no more than he had always predicted and foreseen, but the realisation of his forebodings did not console him for them.

She went back to the London life with a sense of added strength and of restored repose. The long, quiet summer day, with its smell from heather-scented lands blowing through green woodlands and over garden flowers, seemed to go with her, and leave some of its peace in her heart.

How safe and secure and easy life seemed to her, spent by those grey solitary seas, in that little quiet hollow, under the gorse-covered cliffs where her father's hermitage was made.

Was he right? Would she have been discontented there as years went on? She did not think so. At this moment that simple homely day of country things and

country sights and sounds, seemed to her infinitely charming in its peace.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN she reached town after her visit to Ladysrood this day in June, she entered with a sigh the beautiful Palladian house, with its glories of art and architecture, its domed and frescoed staircase, its pomp of powdered servants, and its sweetness of hothouse flowers, dimmed by the grey, sad atmosphere of a sunless London day. The season was at its height; every one said that it was brilliant and delightful; the park was full of equipages and the streets full of well-dressed multitudes; but to her it seemed dreary as any desert, cruel, pitiless, hateful. Life in the country was so much easier, sweeter, safer. All her weight of pain and jealousy seemed to fall back on her like a slab of stone as she entered that mansion which such countless women envied her.

She had only been away three days, but the accumulation of notes and cards and letters of all kinds was large. She told them to bring her some tea to her boudoir, and having slipped on a teagown made like a sacque of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's from a picture at Ladysrood, she sat there and glanced at her correspondence. It was just six o'clock; there was a large and important dinner for royalty on her list for that evening, but there were yet two full hours before she need dress for it. She drank her tea all alone, gazing at the roses which she had brought up from Ladysrood in their baskets of moss, and thinking with a pang of

how the sun was slanting westward over the moors and the sands of Christ'slea, and the little birds were flying amongst the ripening apples, and the fisherboys were rowing over the pleasant sea, and all the balmy air was blowing mild and glad through the tossing lilacs and the bushes of homely southern-wood.

If only she had never left these! How much happier she would have been, let her father say what he might!

She sighed wearily as she breathed the heavy London air; heavy even here, where all that artificial and natural fragrance could do to sweeten and to lighten it was done. This beautiful boudoir, with its walls completely lined by old Saxe china, its ceiling exquisitely painted with flowers, its windows draped with lace and cream-coloured satin, seemed to her like a prison after the moorlands, the orchards, and the shore. The hearts in which a deep love of country things is rooted beat ill at ease in cities.

And yet in the country it had seemed to her that its silence and its sweetness made pain harder to bear than when thought was muffled and stifled under the noise and the follies of crowds.

Poor human nature, in pain and anxiety, is like a sick child tossing on his bed, who fancies now this side and now that will give most rest, and finds rest on neither side because there is no rest in himself.

She had not been alone ten minutes before the servant announced Lord Aubrey.

"Well, dear, so you have been to the country?" he said, taking her hands in his kindly clasp. "It is the best medicine for sick souls, only, alas! we never have

time to take it, or we dilute it so with a mixture of the world that all its virtue goes out of it? How is your father?"

"He is as well as he ever is," said Gladys, and she coloured, for she remembered what her father said of Aubrey. "He said the same as you did," she added, after a moment.

"I was sure that he would," answered Aubrey. "Think no more of it. Try and enjoy your youth while you can. I have not been enjoying my sober manhood at all at Balmoral. We had five feet of snow on midsummer day."

And he told her stories of his stay there, and touched on matters of foreign policy in which she had become interested in her attendance at debates. But he found her pensive and preoccupied; she was troubled between her natural instincts of confidence in him and the remembrance of her father's warning to have no friend amongst his sex.

"Has Mr. Vernon told you not to put your trust in me?" asked Aubrey, sadly. "I thought he knew me better than to do that."

"No, no; he did not tell me so, indeed! He knows how noble and how good you are," she said with embarrassment. "But he said that a woman should not have any friend except her husband—that was all, and that it was I who had done wrong to complain to you."

"But when her husband does not care to be even her friend?" thought Aubrey bitterly, as he said aloud: "I think your father is quite right in theory, my dear; quite right as a general rule. But, to begin with, I am Evelyn's cousin-german, and am as much interested as

you are in his honour and happiness; and, in the second, I am neither a young man nor a thoughtless one. Your father is not, unhappily, enough with you to be your adviser in the world; and I think I may so far try to supply his place without doing or saying anything for which Evelyn would not thank me."

"Oh, what should I do without you?"

She spoke with warmth and gratitude, and stretched her hand out to him with a childlike gesture of confidence.

"You would do very well, I daresay. Do not make me too vain," said Aubrey, with a kind smile, as he took her hand, and held it for a moment only.

Her gesture had displaced some of the notes and cards lying on a little table at her side; they fell in her lap; as she took one of them up she gave a little exclamation, and showed the card to Aubrey. On it was the double crown of a duchess by marriage who was a princess in her own right, and under them was printed "*Duchesse Sorìa, née Princesse Brancaleone.*"

"Ah!" ejaculated Aubrey, off his guard for a moment. "How is that card here? Do you know her?"

"I was once at her house in Venice. I suppose she is in London, and called yesterday. I shall like to meet her again. I think she is the most beautiful woman I ever saw in all my life."

"She is certainly very handsome."

"But we never saw her again, as we left Venice the next day, and I fancied that Evelyn did not like her."

"Did you? Why?"



"He was constrained before her; and he seemed angry that I admired her."

"Poor little innocent!" thought Aubrey. "It will be something more trying to you than Olive Shiffton now."

"Do you not like her?" she asked, wondering at his silence.

"Like her? Well, yes. She is very beautiful, as you say, and, I believe, she is a woman of originally noble character if she had been generously dealt with by fate."

"Is she unhappy, too, then?"

"Her husband was not worthy of her, I believe; and I know that she lost a child she was passionately attached to a few years ago. But I have only seen her in the world. I have no intimacy with her."

"It was very kind of her to think of me," said Gladys gratefully. "I did admire her so much; I was so young and so shy; I felt so foolish before her."

"Well, the shyness is cured," said Aubrey, with his indolent, indulgent smile. "But the youth is not quite over as yet, is it?"

"I feel very old," she said with a sigh.

He laughed; he did not wish to refer seriously to his last interview with her; and he foresaw for her trials much graver than any which she had passed through as yet.

A few minutes later Guilderoy entered the little room. He was looking animated and interested. He greeted his wife with graceful courtesy, if with little warmth, and asked, with much more genuine feeling, of Vernon's health. Gladys was touched by his tone and

pleased by his entrance; it was so very rarely that ever he came there.

"Perhaps it is as my father says, a great deal my fancy and a great deal my fault," she thought.

Aubrey soon rose and left them together. He felt an irritation which it was impossible for him to display.

"He is only so kind," he thought, "because he wants her to receive Beatrice Sorla."

In truth, scarcely had the door closed on him than Guilderoy took up the card with the double crown.

"The lady you admired so much in Venice is here," he said. "I asked her to leave this on you yesterday. Return her call to-morrow. Show her every deference."

There was a sound of embarrassment in his voice; but she did not notice it. She promised willingly what he wished.

"I thought in Venice that you did not like her," she said to him, "and I admired her so greatly. You have never seen her since then, of course?"

"Why, of course?" he replied, impatiently.

"Because you would have said so," she answered in her simplicity.

"I have seen her once or twice in Paris," said Guilderoy, with some constraint. "You know she has been in retirement. Sorla was killed by another Neapolitan, two years ago, in a duel."

"And how came you to see her yesterday?"

"I met her in the park."

This was all true to the letter, but not to the spirit. But Gladys, however, was not at that moment critical.

She was endeavouring with all her strength to be agreeable and pliant to him, as her father had counselled her to be.

That night she saw the Duchess Soria at a ball at Marlborough House. They renewed their acquaintance with a pleasure quite genuine on the one side, if only graciously simulated on the other.

"What did I tell you?" said Lady Sunbury to her cousin Ermyntrude as Mme. Soria, in all the blaze of her historic diamonds, passed them with her royal host.

That night Gladys was consoled to see that her husband scarcely approached Olive Shiffton, who was present, and who looked very pretty, and a little angered: the small shooting-star disquieted by the rising of this great planet from the south.

"Perhaps he is tired of her; or perhaps it was never really anything," she thought, almost reassured; and she went home at dawn and went to sleep almost happily, dreaming of the quiet waters of the bay by Christslea and the sound of the fishermen's voices as they pulled up their cobbles on the beach.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"It was not true certainly," she said to Aubrey, a week later. "You see he never notices her now, and she looks annoyed. You were right to make me promise to say nothing."

Aubrey looked at her with an infinite compassion which he could not reveal.

"It is always best to say nothing, whatever be the provocation," he answered. "These follies pass. They are beneath notice while they last. They are butterflies; you cannot break them seriously on the wheel of jealousy and anger."

"They are poisonous butterflies," said Gladys, with a sad smile. "And you know the butterfly in one stage of its life devours roses and lays gardens waste."

"I know," said Aubrey. "But other roses come, and the garden grows green again some time or another."

"Not always," she answered.

"No, not always, I admit."

He was a man who believed in great passions and great sorrows. He knew that most passions and most sorrows pass, because most characters are shallow; but he knew that there were exceptional natures, and that these could never easily find either consolation or oblivion. For these few in the garden of life, the roses once dead, few flowers have fragrance.

Olive Shiffton had been a mere caprice, a mere episode; but such caprices and such episodes would be repeated *ad infinitum* in his cousin's existence. How was it possible to reconcile Gladys to this, or even to prepare her for it? How was it possible even to hint to her that the cessation of this offence to her was due to the presence of another woman whose influence was higher, finer, nobler, but infinitely more to be dreaded? Of Olive Shiffton, and of all those whom she resembled and represented, Guilderoy was certain to grow fatigued and intolerant with time; but if Beatrice Sorla obtained her power over him again it would be for long, perchance for life.

But it would have been of no use to suggest any danger of this sort, even if his delicacy and honour had permitted him to do so. Fate is cruel and contradictory enough at all times, he knew; but it is often better to let her alone to do her worst than it is to meddle with what is vague to us and will surely escape us in our ignorant handling of it.

With that peculiar self-deception which is so common even in persons of the quickest perceptions and intentions, Guilderoy never supposed that his marriage appeared otherwise than most harmonious to the world. He indeed often went out of his way to do things which should show that it was so. In his heart he repented it every hour that he thought about it at all, but it would have been intolerable to him to think that his acquaintance ever suspected he did so. When Olive Shiffton had once ventured a jest about it, relying on her privilege of intimacy, he had silenced her in a tone which it was impossible for her to mistake. If he had adored his wife he could not have been more reverential to her name before others than he was.

"Sometimes I think he is fond of her after all," said Ermytrude Longleat to her brother, on hearing the story of his rebuff to Mrs. Shiffton as it went the round of society.

"No; he is not fond of *her*, not in the least," replied Aubrey. "But he has that sentiment that his wife is part of his own dignity, of his own honour, which so long survives all attachment, and exists even where no attachment ever was, because it is a form of personal vanity. He may slight her himself, but he will let no one else slight her; that is not a matter of

the affections, but of self-love and of family pride. It is the same kind of sentiment which he has for Ladysrood, though Ladysrood *per se* bores him to extinction."

"He deserves to lose both Ladysrood and his wife."

"Ah, my dear! if we all had only what we deserve we should be most of us very ill off!"

The season went on its course and closed without her being rudely awakened from this last illusion. Many saw indeed what an utter illusion it was, but no one had brutality enough to rouse her from it, and show her how utterly she was self-deceived.

She only saw that Guilderoy had grown wholly indifferent to the seductions of Olive Shiffton, and was now never seen beside her. It was not sufficient to make her happy, but it relieved her from her keenest and most harassing anxiety, and she never dreamed that it was the presence of another woman, and not any mercifulness to herself, which made Guilderoy almost rudely neglect and ignore his late diversion.

One glance of inquiring scorn from the lustrous eyes of Beatrice Soria, as they had passed slowly in review the attractions and the pretensions of Olive Shiffton, had been enough to make him feel ashamed of ever having felt the sorcery of those inferior and venal charms. He had no emotion so keen as his dread lest any gossip of the town should reveal to the Duchess Soria the frivolous story of his latest intrigue. His feeling for the colonial adventuress had been so entirely awakened by physical attractions, had been so absolutely void of any kind of higher feeling, or any shadow of esteem, that it became very rapidly distaste or dislike

the moment that he felt that it might imperil for him the regard and the patience of the only woman he had ever loved.

For he knew now that Beatrice Sorla held a place in his passions and emotions that no other woman had ever reached. She was lost to him, or he believed her lost to him, through his own fault, his own levity; but for that very reason his whole soul turned to her as the sunflower to the sun that sets.

He had met her often since the evening in Venice; but, though he had been frankly admitted to her presence, and treated with friendship and kindness, he had never as yet been able to pass those outer courts; he had never been able to recover any one of the forfeited privileges of the past; he had never been able to tell whether she loved him, hated him, or was wholly indifferent to him. All that he could see was that, to all appearance, no one had succeeded him in her affections. The world coupled no one's name with hers, and there was no one of her large circle who could in any way claim any distinction above the rest. That was all which he had been able to ascertain or to divine when he had been in her society in Paris or in Italy; it was all he could tell now that she was in his own English world of fashion, and renewed her acquaintance with him and with his wife with all the pleasant welcome due to *bonnes connaissances* in society.

The mystery, and what was to him the mortification, of his ignorance of the feelings of a woman who had been once as wax to his hands and as flame to his passions, occupied him and attracted him to the exclusion of almost every other thought.

He had not known what he had felt when he had heard of the death of Hugo Soria, in a duel with another Neapolitan. He could not still be sure whether he felt regret at his powerlessness to replace him, or relief that it had been made impossible that he should do so. He was conscious that it must increase tenfold his own offence against the survivor. Who could ever have foreseen so premature a death, for a man young, fortunate, and singularly skilled in all arts of attack and defence? To him it had always seemed probable that Soria would long outlive himself.

He had seen nothing of her since her husband's tragic end; two years had gone by, and it was understood that she was adhering to the strictest rules of mourning and retreat. Rumour said also, that she had received a severe shock, when in the gay, roseate sunshine of Naples, after a ball, the dead body of Soria, with a blood-stained cloak thrown over his face had been carried into her presence by the masked bearers of a religious fraternity. She had known nothing of the duel, and was crossing the vestibule to go to her own apartments when the terrible procession came in sight across the sunlight of the marble colonnade. Guilderoy could see the scene as though he had been present at it; the marble arches of the loggia, with the blue sea and the blue sky shining beyond them, the warm, rose-hued light of sunrise streaming in from the gardens, and, glowing in the warmth, the figure of her in her ball-dress and her jewels, pausing in the fascination of terror as the black-robed bearers approached with their burden; he could see it all as though he had been there; he never thought of it without a



shudder, and he strove to think of it as little as he could.

Two years had gone by since that time, and she had returned to the world. He had seen her twice or thrice, and had found her more beautiful than she had ever been. If her thoughts reproached him for his marriage, her lips never did.

"We will not speak of Hugo," she had said to him when he first met her, and strove to say something, he knew not what, of conventional regret. But these were the only words of the least familiarity which ever escaped her towards him, and whether she forgave his own faithlessness to her, or whether she resented it too deeply for all words, he with all his penetration into the souls of women, could not tell. Anyhow Soria was dead, and she was once more free: with her immense personal fortune, her marvellous charm, her great social reputation, and her irresistible power over men, could now be wooed, possibly won, by any living man except himself.

When he recalled the words of his letter of farewell, his cheeks grew red with shame; what could such a woman as she have thought of him when he had abandoned her like any courtesan, hired and dismissed? Perhaps she had despised him too absolutely even to honour him by resentment? He could not tell. Her manner to him remained wholly what it had been in the Palazzo Contarini; within view of their past relations, such a manner could be but a cloak; but whether what it covered were tenderness or hatred, reproach or offence too indelible for reproach, he could not tell,

only he knew that with her it could not be indifference; that was wholly impossible to her whole character.

What motive had brought her to England? True, she was a great lady, allied by friendship and even by blood with many English families, but he felt that she did not come to his country without some intention personally touching himself.

They were in the same world; they must meet again and again even if neither sought to meet; he could not credit that it was either mere caprice, or mere accident, which had brought her to grace the last weeks of the London season with her courted presence.

He had gone to pay her homage, he had been admitted with many others, he had had no word or glance which distinguished him from her other acquaintance; but he had felt the old thrill which her voice awakened in him; he was conscious of the old delirious charm with which she moved him, and life became for him filled once more with romantic and agitated interest.

"She is the only woman whom I ever loved," he had thought as he left her that day.

He wished his right hand had been cut off before it could have ever written that brutal and ineffaceable letter of adieu. And being a man of the world, he had said to his wife on his return, "Call on the Duchess Sorla: show her every deference."

That in wishing her to go there he was transgressing against those unwritten rules of custom and social habits by which men of the world are more often governed than by any laws, social or moral, he knew well enough, but it did not affect him. His mind and his feelings were so centred for the time on the woman

whom he had lost, that he was insensible to any other sentiment. To have Beatrice Soria once more beside him in the rose gardens of Ladysrood as in the years gone by, he would have sacrificed much; at times he thought that he would sacrifice anything. There at last he could find some occasion to learn whether he were, or not, wholly exiled from that soul in which he had once reigned alone. To believe, as he was forced to believe, that she had grown wholly indifferent to him was the first humiliation in matters of the heart which he had ever suffered. He knew that he had deserved his fate, and had brought it on himself; but this knowledge only increased the bitterness of his mortification, and the keenness of his anxiety to penetrate the mystery of her feeling towards him.

"What does she think of me?" was the wonder incessantly recurrent to his thoughts. She baffled all his desires to learn, as effectually as she had done so in Venice. Ever since he had written that fateful letter in the library at Ladysrood he had never heard, or received from her, one syllable beyond the serene and colourless phrases of an ordinary social intimacy.

The memory of his whole relations with her might have faded out into absolute oblivion for any trace that she gave of seeing in him anything beyond any other of the many acquaintances and admirers who flocked to greet her on her arrival in London.

He seemed forgotten as utterly as no doubt Hugo Soria was forgotten, lying in the mausoleum amongst the roses and cypress at Sorrento.

Meanwhile to his wife he was kind. He was grateful to her for her sincere and frankly expressed admira-

tion of her great rival, and he was touched, even whilst he betrayed them, by the unconsciousness and confidence which she showed. After all, perhaps she was becoming facile, he thought; after all she had certainly many lovely qualities.

Curiously enough the influences which most drew his feelings away from her yet made him so far sensible of her merits that he saw more of her and spoke more to her than he had done for months; and she, attributing the change in him to his rupture with Olive Shiff-ton, was both unsuspecting and almost happy. Perhaps after all, she thought, her father was right; and the silent patience and constancy of absolute devotion might have power over him at the last.

Aubrey, of course, saw her pathetic error; but though his pity for it wrung his own heart, he was too loyal to his cousin and too merciful to her to breathe any hint which could suggest to her the truth. There was nothing in the manner of Beatrice Soria to hint it to her. She had been always too great a lady to tolerate the coarseness of the exhibition of passion in society, and even at the time when Guilderoy's power over her had been strongest, she had never chosen that the world should be able to read their secret in their public attitude. She left such vulgarities to such women as Olive Shiff-ton, less certain of their influence and more eager to display their dominion than was she. "When you are sure yourself, what matters who doubts?" she thought now; she was herself wholly conscious that Guilderoy would obey her slightest sign whenever she chose to make one, as the hawk obeys the cry of the falconer. She was in no haste to make it. She had

been deserted, humiliated, betrayed; she was not yet certain whether she hated him or forgave him.

"Time will tell me," she thought, with that strange coldness of patience which runs side by side with the fervours and ardours of the passions in all blood of southern races.

Meantime she called all her wit, intelligence, and beauty to her aid, and obtained with them so great a success in this English world of his that all which the consciousness of other men's admiration of what he had abandoned could add to his regrets was added to stimulate revived desires. No hand could "throw the sulphur" with more perfect skill and sorcery than hers. For the most potent of all her charms was that, beneath all the bland arts of seduction and all the polished powers of a woman of the world, there were the richness and the warmth and the unwise impulses of the heart still living and beating if anyone had power to make them live and beat for him.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONE day Aubrey found himself alone beside Beatrice Sorla at a garden party at Sion House. They had walked on together under the trees until no one was close to them, and the river was before them.

"We see you so seldom in this idle world, Lord Aubrey," she said in her beautiful and mellowed English.

"Public life is a hard mistress," replied Aubrey. "She is always saying of one in her jealousy:—

Quod si forte alios jam nunc suspirat amores,  
Tunc, precor, infidos, sancte, relinque focos."

"She is more unreasonable, then, than other women are in our day, whatever they were in Tibullus's," said the Duchess Soria. She was herself fond of the classics, and learned in them like Tullia Arragona, and Vittoria Colonna. "You have no good metrical translation of the Elegies, or the Songs, in English, have you?"

"Alas, no," said Aubrey. "I often wonder they have tempted no poet. John Vernon, though no poet, has made, I think, versions of a few."

"Who is John Vernon? Ah, to be sure, I remember. He is a great scholar and very charming, is he not?"

"I think you will like him. He is not of our time. He reminds one of those studious and lettered gentlemen who lived in the quiet of the country in the days of the Georges, and were content as none of us contrive to be content. How do you like his daughter?"

"Lady Guilderoy?"

"Yes; Gladys, as we call her. What do you think of her?"

The Duchess Soria answered with bland praise. She was a mistress in that delicate art; she never said too much, but the little she said was sweet as the south wind, and never commonplace. In a few slight sentences she showed Aubrey that she saw the character of Guilderoy's wife with perfect justice and accuracy.

"Perhaps she is a little too grave for her years. Men are not fond of gravity, though it is a quality so safe," she added with a smile.

"I do not think she is by nature grave," said Aubrey. "The world oppresses her. There are natures

which suffer in it; suffer from its *banalité*, its artifices, its intrigue, its necessities for dissimulation."

"Perhaps," said his companion. "But when the world is always with us it is better to be interested in it. Like whist, it will amuse our old age when our passions are mere pall-bearers of a corpse."

"But there are those who can never feel that interest. She is one of them. What is she to do?"

"She is in love with her husband," said Beatrice Soria, with a delicate intonation of scorn. "When that passes——"

"It will not pass."

"Oh, my dear lord!"

"I am convinced that it will not."

"You are very cruel to him. He will not be grateful."

"No, he will not, unless"—Aubrey paused and turned to her with a look which said more than his words—"unless you, Duchess, who have more influence over him than any one, would tell him that he should be so."

"I!"—the word was a haughty refusal in itself.

"You disappoint me," murmured Aubrey. "You have so much power, if you would only have as much mercy."

"My dear lord, that is not my *rôle*. One cannot preach what one has never practised; one cannot advocate what one does not believe in. I have no belief in conjugal happiness. I believe in the joys of the passions, I believe in the pleasures of vanity, I believe in the consolation of children, and I believe—perhaps—in the sweetness of vengeance. But in these alone.

Lady Guilderoy will, no doubt, have all these consolations and pleasures. If she require her husband's fidelity also she will be disappointed. No doubt she will be at first disappointed very much. But she will also no doubt find out *qu'on peut s'en passer*."

"You are cruel to her," said Aubrey, with a sigh.

"My dear lord," said Beatrice Soria, "men wish women to behave to them with sultry heat of passion when they want passion, and with perfect absence of passion when they have ceased to want it. They require the tropics one hour, the poles the next. They want fire out of ice; when they have effected the transformation they wish the fire to become ice again. Now men are not gods that by the mere exercise of their caprice they can bring about these changes. On the contrary, they ask for such impossibilities and contradictions that they very often make of a woman who was tender, and malleable, and generous before, a very devil, because they have put the devil of pain and injustice into her. Then they are exceedingly surprised at the issue of their work, and if the evil they have created out of good hurts them themselves they are angry, and cry out, for they are children, and bad children: spoilt, selfish, and unkind, never to be trusted out of sight, and always cruel wherever they are loved."

She spoke with force and warmth and scorn. Her voice was low, but in the mellow and thrilling tones of it there was a concentration of all the indignity, the suffering, the humiliation, disdain, and wrath which had been held in silence in her soul ever since the day that she had received Guilderoy.



She knew that Aubrey was aware of her past relations with his cousin. Circumstances had made him their confidant in the early days of their intimacy; and he had been always on such terms with her as had permitted him some frank expressions of his thoughts. But here he felt that his words had been wasted. She was not a woman to be moved by entreaty or suggestion from any desire or intention of her own.

Aubrey raised his hat and turned away as others approached and occupied her attention.

"Certainly he behaved very ill to her," he thought; and then the paucity and insufficiency of such poor, trite, commonplace words to express the unutterable, ineffaceable, affront which Guilderoy had passed upon such a woman as she was, seemed to him like a renewed insult to her. Why should she show any clemency? None had been shown to her.

And yet he thought one might move her still by her heart if one dared to appeal to it. But he felt that he could not presume to seek to learn what she felt, whether of hatred or of love, to the man by whom she had been forsaken.

That the wound given her was still unhealed he knew by the profound and mingled emotions with which she had spoken.

Her lover had killed much in her which had been generous, tender, and magnanimous. He had inflicted on her a wound into which all her best feelings and instincts had sunk, as treasure foundered in a deep sea. If he suffered in time for the injury he had done, whose fault would it be? Not hers, surely.

Beatrice Sorla glanced after him as she spoke with her other acquaintances.

"A man and a gentleman," she thought, "and a true friend. But how like an Englishman, to have no better way of trying to gain a point than to ask for it!"

## CHAPTER XXIX.

"You have invited Mme. Soria?" asked Guilderoy, looking over his wife's list for the house parties.

"I had not thought of it," said Gladys. "Will she care to come?"

"I heard her express a wish to see the English *vie de château*," replied Guilderoy. "Ask her, at any rate. Ask her in person. I am sure she will not refuse you."

"I will try," said Gladys.

And she took an early occasion to do so when they met at the last Drawing-room of the season. Beatrice Sorla did not reply for a moment; a faint smile came on her beautiful mouth. Gladys wondered of what she was thinking. The next moment she accepted the invitation conditionally; it was possible she would not be in England; if she were she would be happy to come to Ladysrood for a day or two.

"I am very glad," said Gladys in her unconsciousness. "Pray do not forsake England so soon. Lord Guilderoy is so very anxious that you should honour us in the country."

"Lord Guilderoy is always so amiable," replied the Duchess Soria. "And when his ambassadress is one so irresistible as his wife, his wishes are always certain to be crowned with success."

"When she says those graceful things so beautifully, does she mean them, do you think?" asked Gladys when she recounted the result of her mission to Guilderoy on her return from Court that day.

"My dear child," said Guilderoy with impatience, "what a very childlike question! One would think you were on the cliffs at Christslea still! Who ever does mean anything that they say in this world? These pretty things are the mother-of-pearl counters with which one plays the game of society; who has the most of them wins the game. Surely you know that by this time."

"I should be sorry to think it was only that," she said wistfully. "I should like her to like me."

"Of course, she does like you; she has told me so," said Guilderoy with some irritation. "People would always like you if you were more pliant, more amused, more good-natured. Oh, I know you are goodness itself to all your poor people, and that you are very often doing very kind things even in society, for I hear of them. But that is not the amiability I mean. When we do a favour, nine times out of ten we make a foe instead of a friend, for there are very few natures which a sense of obligation does not sour. The amiability which is successful is the knack of saying things gracefully, of seeming interested when we are bored, of seeming to approve when we disapprove, to agree when we disagree, to make the most uninteresting stranger

believe that he is the salt of the earth to us: that is what social amiability means, and you never attempt to acquire it."

"It is hypocrisy," said Gladys, with scorn in her eyes.

"It is nothing of the kind. Hypocrisy intends to deceive. Social amiability knows that it deceives nobody—at least nobody who has any knowledge of the world—but it avoids friction, it polishes, and softens, and soothes; it gives every one a vague sense of *bien-être*, and diffuses an agreeable atmosphere. That is what you have not, and I fear never will have. You are *très-grande dame*; that I quite grant; but you have modelled yourself too much on my sister, and have imbibed her unfortunate ideas that to be virtuous and truthful it is primarily necessary to be what Sunbury calls 'infernally disagreeable.' It is not my language—it is his, and I ought to apologise for quoting it—but it is really so inimitably descriptive!"

Gladys coloured with indignation. She knew that she was wholly and utterly unlike Hilda Sunbury in every opinion and quality; she knew that in comparing her to his sister he compared her to what he considered the most unsympathetic and uncompanionable of her sex; she knew that she had just been doing her utmost to please him and to succeed in her mission to the Duchess Soria; and she felt unbearably and intolerably wronged by the injustice of his censures and the contemptuous impatience of his tone.

"I do not think that you have any right to speak to me in such a manner as that," she said in a voice which shook slightly, yet was very firm. "I know that

you prefer every other woman in society to me; but your indifference should not warp you into injustice and discourtesy. I knew nothing of the world when I married you; I have tried to learn all that I could, and the lesson is hard, or I am stupid. I have not the pliancy and facility of the ladies who are your friends; but I must ask you to remember one thing—it was not I who ever sought you, and my father again and again in vain endeavoured to dissuade you from your marriage with me.”

Before he had recovered from his astonishment sufficiently to answer her she had gathered her train over her arm, bowed to him, and left him.

### CHAPTER XXX.

HE had been silent from sheer astonishment at the passionate outburst of one whom he had always considered physically cold and mentally unperceptive.

It was a scene: it was not the first which had taken place between them, but it was the most embittered. There were words in it which stung his conscience, and there were other words which awakened his anger. His very sense that there was a great deal of justice in her reproaches made them the more unwelcome to him. He had thought her unimpassioned, he had even lauded her and been glad that she should be so; and he saw for the first time that deep down in her soul, under the silence of pride and the ignorance of habit, there were strong and embittered feelings.

He knew women and the world too intimately not to know all that the existence of this feeling might mean in time for himself. He was a man too sensitive to the world's comments and too intolerant of publicity and interference not to see with the gravest apprehensions the possible approach of his wife's entrance into that stage of suspicion and of irritation which usually precedes and produces an exposure to the world of disunion. He knew that he had only himself to blame; he knew that a little more consideration for her, a little more demonstration of affection on his part, would have sufficed to shut the eyes and lull the soul of so young a woman. He had believed her cold; he had let her drift away from him, content indeed that she should do so; but he had never supposed either that she had felt his neglect so strongly or would ever express her sense of it so openly. The mere thought of a future in which such scenes were possible alarmed him beyond words. Of all things he prized peace, freedom, and apparent harmony.

"When once they are jealous!" he thought with a shudder—the shudder of a man who has passed through a thousand scenes of invective and reproach in penalty of his pleasures.

Was it possible, he wondered, that she was jealous of Beatrice Sorla? Had any one told her the story of his past?

With the yearning remembrance of that one name of magic, he left his house and went where he often went at this hour. It was five o'clock. She was most days to be found at home then, adhering to her in-

dolent Italian habit of never leaving the house till sunset.

The London world was at her feet, and delighted to wait on her. All that was choicest in it had received her gracious hospitality in her own residence at Naples and at Paris, and had many charming memories for which to be grateful of moonlit-garden fêtes at the beautiful Sorrento villa, and dinners of delightful gaiety and wit in her house in the Avenue du Bois de Bologne. All that London could offer to her—and it is very much when it is in the mood—it offered in return. The staircase of her hotel was as thronged as the staircase of Buckingham Palace on the evening of a State ball.

She had one of the suite of rooms which are given to royal persons; she had had them filled with hot-house plants and flowers. The London mists and rain were disgusting things to her; she strove to forget them as well as she could in the green twilight of palm leaves and the delicate glories of orchidæ.

He found her apartments thronged; it was known that she was often to be found at this hour. Princes and ministers, ambassadors and ambassadresses, wits and *élégantes* and dandies, all that was most agreeable, exalted, and exclusive in English society were there to do her homage. He was only one in a crowd of great people, most of them greater than he. He remembered with a bitter pang the time when, for his sake, her doors had been closed to all comers.

"*Voilà le passé de la Duchesse,*" he heard a diplomatist smilingly say with a glance at him as he passed. "*Qui sera son avenir?*"

The jest made him irritated and mortified. He had been her past indeed!—her all in all, her one exclusive thought, her dream, her empire, her heaven. He had been all that, and he had tired of being it, ingrate that he was! Who would be as much to her future? Any one?

All that baser quality of men's love which is stimulated and strengthened by the spur of social jealousies and the sight of social successes in the one beloved, all that element which is compounded of vanity, emulation, and admiration increased by the world's admiration, all moved in him, intensified besides by the state of anger and offence against his wife in which he had come thither. Never, in the earliest hours of his adoration for her, had he believed himself so passionately the lover of Beatrice Soria as he felt that he was now capable of becoming. And she had nothing in return for him except the touch of a soft cool hand, the welcome of a sweet bland smile, the wit of brilliant and polished phrases, all which all others there enjoyed; all, and no more than that. Never since the evening when he had seen her in the Palazzo Contarini had he before felt so passionately all that he had thrown away in surrendering, of his own free will, his right to the first place in her presence and in her thoughts.

He had thought her chain too closely fastened on him, and he had cast it off in a moment of impatience and fatigue; but now he felt that there were no dust and ashes of humiliation which he would not eat if he could only by them once more gain the right to kneel at her feet and to become hers once more. He arrived



with the crowd and he was dismissed with it. Never once in all the times that they had met had she allowed him any solitary moment with her. He had surrendered his right to any; he had to learn that such rights could not be resumed at will.

Meanwhile, no sooner had his wife been left alone, than she had grown conscious of how she had sinned against all her promises to Aubrey and all the counsels of her father. She knew that she had lost patience at the very moment when patience would perhaps have rewarded her, and forgotten both wisdom and prudence in the more selfish pain of offended pride.

She had said nothing which was not true; but there are truths which must never be uttered if union and the peace of the future are desired. The very force and indisputable justice of such truth must constitute, she knew, the heaviest accusation and reproach against him. She had set a guard over her lips through so many trying moments only to fail at the first word which had mortified her.

With the tears streaming down her cheeks she wrote and confessed her fault to her father.

"I am nothing to him, I know," she wrote; "but why must he so often tell me so? If he would let me return and live with you I would do so, and would not complain. But that he would not like, because it would compromise him before the world."

And then she tore the letter up, and did not send it, lest it should trouble the peace of the solitary of Christsea.

A little later she had to repress, as best she could, everything she felt, and go out to a great dinner. The

dinner was followed by two or three receptions, at which she had to be seen. She did not look well; she was very pale, and her eyelids were swollen.

"How heavy your eyes are," said Aubrey, meeting her for a moment that evening in the crowd of a great house. "Tell me the truth, dear. Has anything fresh happened?"

"Nothing fresh," said Gladys bitterly, "only what I ought to be well used to; what will never alter as long as I live."

"No mortal can say that," answered Aubrey. "There is nothing really hopeless except death. Whilst a person we love lives we should always deem ourselves happy."

"I love no one," she said, in a tone which was almost sullen.

"It is worse than I thought if you have ceased to do so," he said gravely. "But it is not so. You deceive yourself."

They were no longer alone, and he had no answer, nor could he tell from any change in her face whether she had been moved by his words. His heart ached to see that mask of almost sullen indifference and apathy worn on her young features. To what extremity might not love which was deserted, and youth which was unhappy, be driven half in despair and half for sake of vengeance? He would not point out the way to vengeance, but other men would. Though her apparent coldness and her contemptuous inattention to them chilled and daunted many of her wooers, yet there were others whom such repulse attracted. She lived in a society and in an age where fidelity is ridiculed or

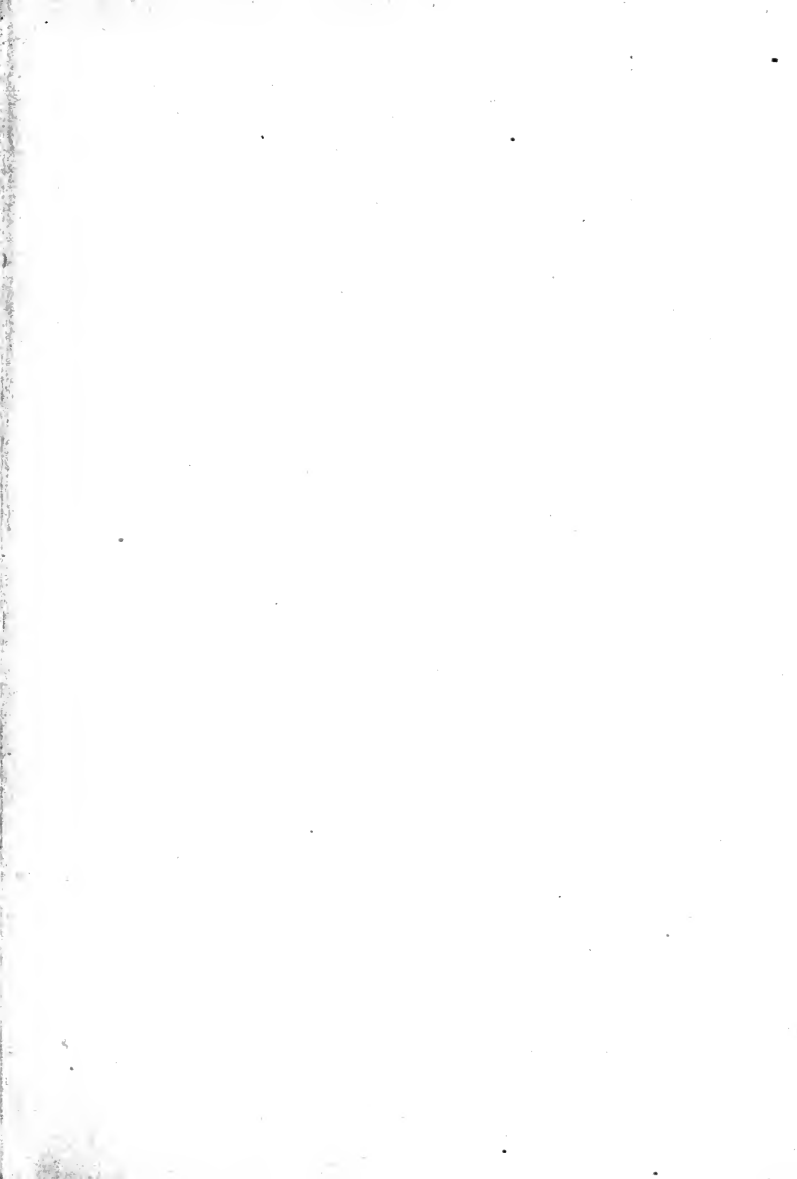
received with incredulity, and wherein compensations and condonations go hand in hand, and are rarely refused. How long would she be without learning the lesson which everything conspired to teach her? She might learn it soon, she might learn it late; but learn it some time or other she would assuredly. Has not Ovid said that Helen, being left alone, was innocent of any fault? *Helenen ego crimine solvo.*

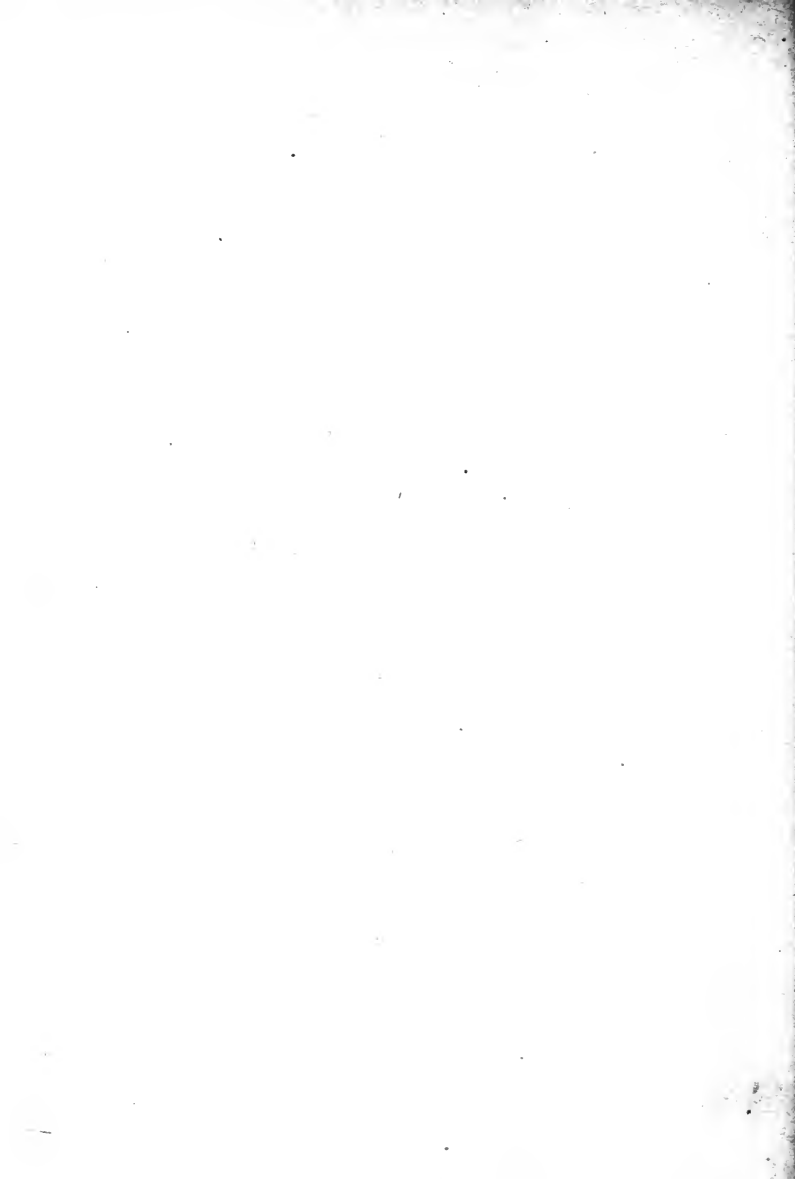
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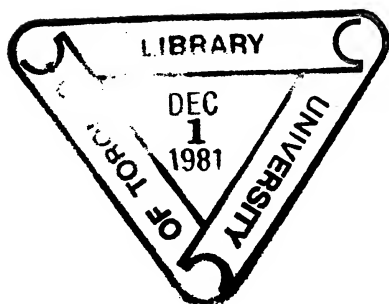






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